

PRAYER & POETRY

HENRI BREMOND

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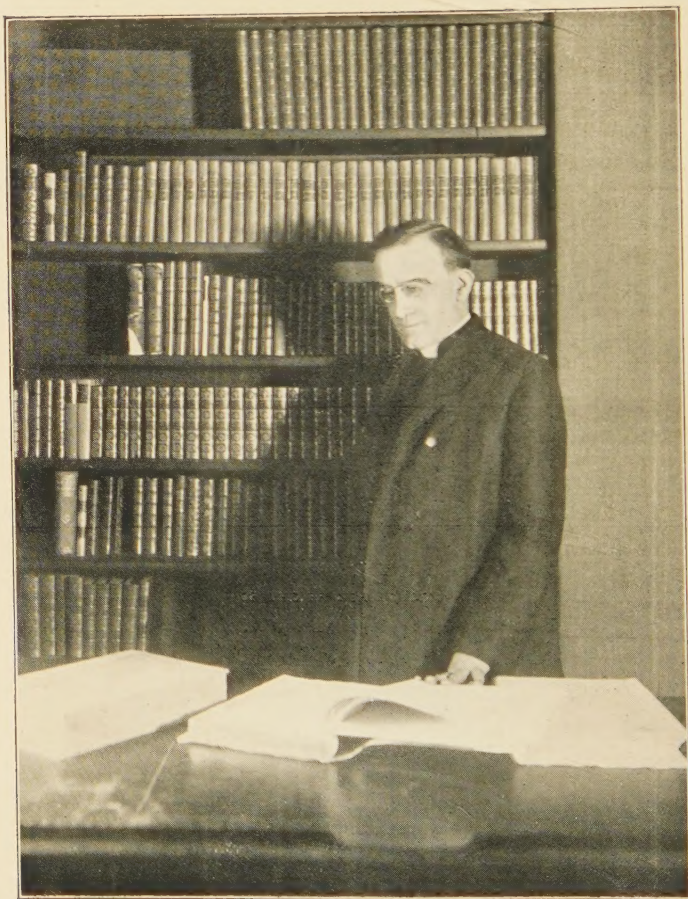
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PRAYER AND POETRY



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HENRI BREMOND
OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

PRAYER & POETRY

A CONTRIBUTION TO POETICAL THEORY

BY

HENRI BREMOND

OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

TRANSLATED, WITH A FOREWORD

BY

ALGAR THOROLD

Labouchere



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TO

MAURICE BLONDEL

SI AMAMUS, ET TUUM EST QUOD HABEO,
ET MEUM EST QUOD HABES

MAURICE BLONDEL
YRABLI
BOY WEN

First published in 1927

Made and Printed in Great Britain

FOREWORD

THE Abbé Henri Bremond, the writer of this little book—little in bulk, but big in meaning—is a Provençal. He was born some sixty years ago at Aix-en-Provence, that city of “fountains, gardens, Florentine palaces, convents, and crickets.” An exquisite place, and it is perhaps not too fanciful to catch the murmur of its bells and fountains in the refrain of Bremond’s prose, which at its best is such perfect music. Like so many others of the great French prosaists, he was from early childhood a pupil of the Jesuits. Indeed, when as a boy of seventeen he felt the allurements of the call *ad superiora*, a vocation to the Society of Jesus presented itself naturally to his imagination, and although his connection with the Society was not to be permanent, his mind has in many ways retained the Jesuit stamp.

A certain uniform efficiency of method and achievement, a great capacity for taking pains, a sincere and profound respect for human nature and its intrinsic laws, together with much subtle analysis of its intimate constitution, are among the gifts which he owes to his first masters. His genius, in the strict sense of the word, as well as his delightful humour, his innocent malice, his *esprit moqueur*, so disconcerting to pedants, is his own.

In 1882 the young Bremond left his sunny home

for the noviceship of the French Jesuits at Canterbury, and during the next few years the second great formative influence of his life began to make itself felt. The first English writers with whom he made acquaintance were George Eliot and Dickens. Later, he was to come under the influence of Newman and the Tractarians, and his knowledge and appreciation of English nineteenth-century literature became unexcelled, perhaps unequalled, by any other French writer of his generation.

His greatest literary work has no doubt been his *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, the seventh volume of which is on the point of appearing. He commenced this great book comparatively late in life, after he had left the Society of Jesus. It is a truly wonderful achievement which earned him his academic *fauteuil* and his sobriquet of "the Catholic Ste Beuve." Would that we had an English translation of it!

The book here offered to the English reader in his own tongue is in a sense the ripest effort of Bremond's thought. It grew out of the controversy aroused by a lecture on "Pure Poetry" delivered by him at a public meeting of the five Academies. It needs no bush. One word of caution, however, to critics. Bremond takes a good deal of understanding. He does not lend himself to criticism by extracts. You can only judge of his thesis as a whole. It must be faced fairly and squarely in its entirety if it is to be refuted.

ALGAR THOROLD.

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It is only impetuosity that sustains me. Stripped of that, when I grow cold all is lost, and I am dry when I am wise.—
M. HAMON.

Reason can but speak. It is love that sings.—JOSEPH DE
MAISTRE.

All realities will sing; nothing else will.—COVENTRY
PATMORE.

PRAYER AND POETRY

INTRODUCTION

MAY I be allowed to make a familiar comparison? Can we learn—in any real sense of the word—to swim? It would seem not. To swim is to abandon our foothold once for all, and that act of confidence can neither be taught nor commanded. It is the water itself which, by bearing us up, justifies our trust in it. We do not learn to swim, but one fine day, in the middle of our first lesson or at the end of our twentieth, we perceive that, no longer on the ground, we are not sinking, and that without walking we are changing our position. The case is the same for poetical experience. In the course of the normal development of man, there occur moments in which the discursive reason gives place to a higher activity but imperfectly understood, and, indeed, at first disquieting, self-abandonment to which is justified by a confused presentiment, an expectation of one knows not what delights.

In order to rediscover the path of salvation, says admirably an English critic of the highest merit, Mr. Middleton Murry, it is necessary to take great poetry seriously. To do so is not so easy, and much rarer than one thinks. To reach that point we must

have taken the heroic step, the *salto mortale* of admitting the legitimacy, the value, of a kind of knowledge which does not and cannot express itself, which words cannot render. We must believe that such knowledge is not a myth, that of old there were men who had it at their service, that today there are still such men; and that by the very fact of having such knowledge, these men are our superiors, are more men than we are. If we are capable of taking this step, *à la bonne heure* ! If not, it is unfortunate, but for us, whether we regret it or not, the greatest poet in the world will never be more than "the idle singer of an empty day."

Apart from a few unfortunates, we all take this step, one day or other—and for our greater good. It is not necessary to be a hero or a genius to obey the profound instinct which impels us to do so; but for us Frenchmen, the sons of Descartes, more than for others, a certain courage of the mind is necessary to accept resolutely, without human respect, the philosophy which this simple and happy experience realises and canonises at the same time.

That there is something intangible, a mystery, in poetry has almost always been recognised. But it has been believed during long centuries—from Aristotle to Laharpe—that the great secret would yield itself to a patient analysis. What is this poem made of? How do these verses, admittedly poetical, differ from those which are not? From this point of departure come all the researches on the essence of the

epopœia, on the characters and methods of handling intrigue in tragedy, on the distinction between "manners" and styles; from this come rules and prescriptions; from this comes Boileau. Since the days of the Pre-Romantics, æsthetic inquiry has turned in another direction. The old method having plainly failed, we think we are likely to be more successful—and certainly we cannot well be less—by inquiring no longer into what a poem is made of, but how it is made; in seeking out no longer the mystery of the poem, but the mystery of the poet. Not, indeed, the mystery of his personal history, of his loves, of his weaknesses—that belongs to quite a different branch of inquiry—but of his poet's life as such, and as it has passed into his work. Who does not feel that this change of perspective brings us not, indeed, into the full light, but at least to the dawn which follows the total night in which the old criticism was imprisoned? If great poets have a monopoly of masterpieces, they have no monopoly of the experience which at a certain degree of intensity produces masterpieces. To read the poets poetically—I do not say to understand them—is more or less to resemble them; it is to associate oneself with them, to share in their gift, in their poetic state. *Et pares inveniunt et faciunt*: they already know us for their brothers, and they help us to become still more like them. Why, otherwise, should they condescend to us? Briefly, modern æsthetic theory takes its stand on a less shifting ground where soundings are possible. Our task now

is but to interpret a human experience, however mysterious and ineffable it may and must always remain; to interpret this experience by repeating it afresh. The poet's mystery is also my own, richer, no doubt, but, so far, clearer. There is a mutual call and an interchange of psychical currents; the little that we can see of our own deeper soul gives us access to the deeper soul of the poet, and the more we see of his soul, the clearer grows our own.

From which it is easy to see the road I ought to have taken if I had had both the leisure and the competence to write a real book on the essence of poetry, instead of a short discourse made up of necessarily dogmatic and abstract formulas. My task, at first, would have consisted in placing the reader face to face with his own poetic experience, and thus to charm him insensibly with the very simple philosophy contained in this experience. We would have watched together the more or less confused preparations and the moment of that divine flash in which the mysterious current comes to be, in which a step is taken from one kind of knowledge to another, from the clarities of reason to the more luminous night of poetry. Claudel says somewhere that even Delille gives pleasure. No doubt, but what kind of pleasure? Let us open our hearts to him, and afterwards to Claudel, and we shall soon feel the difference. Others assure us that in every poem their reason finds food. Who denies it? The question is whether that is the whole, the true, menu of the king's banquet. Let us ask our own

experience, and in order to do so, let us once more give hospitality to the passing current. Here might follow a series of paragraphs, each of them offering the reader the study in this way—both vital and technical, the way of experimental analysis—of one of the poems which have enchanted the world. This method, persuasive and caressing rather than dogmatic, would certainly have been the most efficacious, but it would have required thousands of pages.

After which it would have been necessary to question century by century the poetic experience of the past, as revealed to us in the confidences of the poets themselves, or the analyses of critics. Saintsbury's three huge volumes on the history of criticism and æsthetics (which, as a matter of fact, confirm point by point the conclusions at which we are aiming) are far from exhausting this vast subject. Since, however, we have not the right, in a matter of such universal and deeply human significance, to neglect completely the witness of tradition, I may perhaps be allowed to sketch in rough outlines this chapter of our subject which no work of vulgarisation has yet brought within reach of simple inquirers. After that will come a more esoteric and subtle chapter, the subject of which I have only been able to touch on lightly—I mean the comparison between poetic experience and mystical experience ; then a few pages on the fundamental problem of ancient and modern æsthetics, on the Catharsis of Aristotle. Finally, I shall return to the

parallel between the poet and the mystic and deal more closely with it.

All that, flying along the peaks, or, better, beating rapidly the bushes. I am but an amateur, a simple inquirer, and in a hurry. Philosophers and savants will correct me, will put me straight, will see what can be got from these fumbling premisses. Both have been less hard on me hitherto than my colleagues in ignorance. *They*, I fear, will always be hard on me. But I have the impression that everything that is living among us is calling for this philosophy, of which I propose to outline a rough sketch, and that the despairing opposition of a few dead-alives will not hinder its triumph.

CHAPTER I

PLATO AND POETRY IN EXILE

A PURELY rational or non-mystical philosophy of poetry—be it true or false, a question not here discussed—is an accident, as it were a comet, in the universal history of æsthetic: *Prolem sine matre creatam*. Such a philosophy contradicts, if not always the theoretic teaching, at all events the experience of poets of all times; it contradicts, if not always the formulas, at all events the implicit convictions, the distant premisses, the intuitions, of philosophers of all times. Apart from certain relatively very short periods, there has been a general agreement to see in poetry a special activity, not, indeed, opposed to, but distinct from rational activity, properly so called; a sort of knowledge, since it places us in relation with things, but a knowledge of a quite special kind, the immediate object of which is not the Universal, the object of rational knowledge, and the mechanism of which, mysterious as it is, does not obey the rules of the “*Art de Penser*.”

It is well known that we have on our side all the ancient world. Æsthetics was born with the first poets, and in the age of caverns had already excommunicated Boileau. Here are men like us, people

thought, who show no abnormal symptoms in everyday life, and who suddenly, when their frenzy seizes them, talk no longer like others. The reason is that at these times their minds no longer function as those of others. Since, moreover, what they say at such times not only seems to us superior to ordinary language, but furthermore communicates to us a thrill of quite delectable horror, must not the explanation be that during these strange crises a god inhabits and possesses them, and speaks to us through their mouth?

In quite early days these states were judged to be divine. We all know that Homer did not invent the Muses, nor Socrates "enthusiasm." The key to the problem is found. This is the easy retort of common sense, which will grow more precise in the course of ages, to the essence of which it will always be necessary to return. Today—and Buffon suspected it as well as Montesquieu—we have the resource of taking the poet for an eccentric, a fool, a maniac. This alternative did not present itself in those happy days. Folly and divine possession were the same thing. "Democritus," Cicero tells us, "denies that it is possible to be a great poet, if one is not mad." The little poets need not be upset; they also have their share of folly.

And that is why the problem of poetry made Socrates and Plato so unhappy. They adored the poets, and feared in doing so to sin against the light of reason. That divine element which they certainly

did not hesitate to recognise, embarrassed as much as it enchanted them. These two men had a mission to fulfil: to wean human reason from the milk which up till then, while nourishing it, intoxicated it, and even stunted its growth; it was their task to unswathe the baby, teach it to stand upright on its tiny limbs, at length to speak. Grammar had to be invented, and dialectic, and, above all, morality. Poetry already had its weapons. It was possible to neglect it a little, and even, if necessary, seem to attack it. *Fard da se*. Not that they are not willing sometimes to count the poets among the "wise." No, indeed, there is no one wiser. Only—they cannot explain their own wisdom, they do not *know* it. For the fine things they say they have to thank something irrational, a *φύσις τις*, a sort of instinct. Now instinct is the *bête noire* of grammar, dialectic, and morality, that austere trefoil called *σοφία* in those days. Hence the ditch separating men. On one side the reasonable, the conscious sages; on the other the mad sages, *ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντεις καὶ οἱ χρησμωδοί.*"

Ion, for example, Ion the critic-poet and splendid commentator of Homer; Socrates listens to him slyly, then trips him up: "Phew! this gift you have of making us feel the *Iliad* is not much of a thing, after all, since, if I ask you to explain another poet with whom you have less affinity, you have lost your magnetic north, you say nothing. A poor sort of gift that can only treat of the Particular and misses the

Universal, unguided, uncrowned by any *τεχνή*. You surely see that there is nothing in that to make you puff out your chest with pride. Your commentary on Homer does not come from you; it drops on you from heaven, a *θεία δύναμις*, which, unbeknown to you, poor wretch, drags you along like a magnet, has whispered it in your ear. If the gods choose to withdraw this inspiration, to cut off the current, there you are left in your native misery. My case is different. I have the privilege of *σοφία*, which changes me from brute to man, and enables me to apply my resources, increased tenfold by its virtue, wisely, responsibly, and with technical perfection. You are the toy of a divine force; I, as Poet Henley will say one day, am the captain of my soul." Ion, naturally, has a hot potato in his mouth.

Since the poet is by definition the man who cannot explain himself, he naturally cannot defend himself. That is the price that poets and mystics have to pay for their royal gift. His inspiration, however, might have whispered to Ion the following little question: "Tell me, dear Socrates, how it is that your wondrous *σοφία* does not teach you to sing." Or again: "Which do you like best, your *σοφία* or your 'demon'? Your demon, whose inspiration is capricious, irrational, but infallible, cannot any more be fitted into the universal rules or the abstract formulas of a *techné*, and also slips through the pincers of scientific knowledge properly so called."

Already in those early days this opposition between

these two methods of knowledge was the nightmare of Socrates and Plato, as today it is ours, or, if you prefer, their and our problem of problems. In any case, I have sufficiently shown that they were at the antipodes of "classicism." Far from explaining by "reason only" the prestige of poetry, the reproach they level at poetic knowledge is precisely that it is not founded on reason. For them the poet *qua* poet, having been stripped of his normal self, is clothed with a divine self, he is *ἐνθεος*. They have no doubt whatever of this; they are equally persuaded that this inspiration is wisdom, but they suspect and will have nothing to do with a wisdom which owes nothing to the labour of intellect, which cannot present its accounts, which does not come when called, which is not conscious of itself. *σοφία* stiffens all her bristles against mystery; *σοφία* demands an answer to all her queries, a "because" to all the directions she transmits to the will. Thus the soul of Plato is torn between the love, the fear, and the shame of poetry. His anguish, indeed, proves him also to be *ἐνθεος*. "You would be less afraid of me, if I did not already possess you," Poetry may say to him. I note in passing that the great mystics are in like case. It is their reason itself which finally, after lengthy consultation, orders them to abandon themselves with closed eyes to the grace which invites them. The presence of God, at first imminent, then invading, begins by being a horrible torture to them. They would rather not have it, they tremble on the brink of

the "leap of death," and cling desperately to σοφία. As reasonable as Plato in their resistance, they are still more reasonable in yielding themselves up to the mysterious δύναμις, once they have recognised its divinity.

CHAPTER II

ARISTOTLE AND DEPOETISED POETRY

THE reader has understood. The originality of Plato does not consist in his having attributed the inspiration of the poet to the action of a superhuman power, but in his taking so seriously that truth possessed by all minds from time immemorial, in his realisation of it with such intensity and humour, that he came with the solemnity of a legislator and the malice of a child of genius to consider a man dispossessed of himself by such heavenly favours as an undesirable. These charming and magnificent lunatics would make deplorable schoolmasters and incoherent Ministers of State; let us drive them out of the city. (A phantasy, moreover, full of wisdom, which only a Bæotian would take tragically.) Would to heaven that Aristotle had dealt to poetry no harder blows!

Not that Aristotle is a rationalist. He is much too intelligent for that. He formally teaches in the *Rhetoric* that poetry is a "something inspired": "Ενθεον γὰρ ἡ ποίησις, and in the *Poetics* he speaks of a sort of frenzy or ecstasy—μανικοί, ἐκστατικοί—which enables the poet to identify himself with his personages, to lose himself lyrically in their souls. Yet this is not what interests him most in poetry.

Alas! he had an authority at his service. You remember Socrates defying the rhapsodist Ion to construct an *Ars Poetica*, a *techné*. Too clever to waste his own time on exercises of such inevident utility, Socrates left that task to the incarnate *techné*, to Analysis made Man. The task, I mean, of disengaging with the sole help of rational knowledge a philosophy and technique of suprarational knowledge; the task of seeking in the art of walking the secret of flight.

Let us not fear to insist. These Greeks of the golden age dreamed of establishing the dictatorship of *σοφία*. Socrates and Plato, as much as Aristotle; whatever might be the contradictions in their path—flagrant in the case of the first two, as witnesses their supreme appeal to the interior “demon.” But they have different methods of establishing this dictatorship: Plato by exile; Aristotle by a much graver crime. Plato confines himself to pretending to banish anarchists who are rebellious against that conscious and voluntary wisdom whose triumph is to be assured; Aristotle, on the other hand, proposes to incorporate the poets in his Fascist guards of *σοφία*, having exorcised the foreign power which possesses them. He will keep them in his republic, but he will keep them tamed, their poison fangs cut out—in a word, *depoetised*. He will not destroy this or that poet—*uno avulso* . . .; he will destroy poetry itself in its essential definition. To submit to the categories of pure reason and to the rules of practical reason,

an activity the characteristic of which is precisely that it escapes the reach of both these departments of reason, constitutes the most violent and the most absurd *coup d'état*¹ that a philosopher has ever attempted.

In a poem the element of *σοφία* attaches itself exclusively to what the intelligence can seize, explain, control, organise, or reorganise: the conduct of the action, for instance, or the development of the characters, if it is a question of tragedy—two elements which, taken in themselves, neither suppose in the dramatist nor provoke in the spectator a specifically poetical experience. No, writes Newman, it is not true that in a dramatic poem the conduct of the action is so very important. It is not from that that the principal charm of Greek tragedy comes. The more we are captivated by the plot, the less we are able to feel the true poetry of the drama. Aristotle's capital error is not to see, as he ought, in the poet a beautiful genius who gives forth a free and unfettered effusion of genius, but an accomplished technician who knows his business thoroughly. From this point of view, a perfectly constructed piece by a mediocre writer has a higher rank than a poetical masterpiece. Scribe is superior to Shakespeare.

¹ Must I lay the evidence on the table? Science deals with the universal, poetry with the particular. Science can only know, and therefore legislate for the drama *in se*. But there is no drama *in se*. Not a word in *Ædipus the King* suggests *Faust*; every new poem is something unique, a miracle.

The tradition fixed by Aristotle, Newman goes on to say, has decided that the development of the plot of the *Ædipus the King* is a miracle of construction. So be it, but how much more poetical that one trait in the *Ædipus Colonus*, the sudden inspiration which sends the old blind man straight and guideless to the place of his death. One can read these lines over and over again—*decies repetita placebit*—but as far as the, in any case, mediocre pleasure offered us by the cleverly constructed plot of the *Ædipus the King* goes, once our curiosity has been satisfied by witnessing the first representation of the play, it returns no more. A decisive objection, be it noted in passing, to rationalist æsthetics; why reread indefinitely a poem which has nothing new to tell us? It is, concludes Newman, because Aristotle's idea of poetry is all rigid and formal, the idea of a logician. He seems not to suspect the subtle delicacy of the pleasures poetry reserves for us. As soon as his reasoning faculties have swallowed their meagre pittance, his appetite is satisfied.

Egger, who gave several years of his learned life to the study of the *Poetics*, and is no iconoclast, takes the same view. "Aristotle," he says, "in making the transition from logic to the fine arts by way of eloquence (the devil's bridge, indeed!), does not sufficiently perceive *what a distance there is between reason and poetry*. He does not even mention a *faculty which is to passion and the idea of the beautiful what reason is to truth*. . . . Nowhere does he

understand or define the imagination as the creative faculty which produces the beautiful by the processes of art . . . yet he has defined art as a certain creative power . . . he approaches *Poetics* as a logician, and . . . he places poetry, like the syllogism, under the absolute yoke of reason.”¹

To which the Stagirite might reply: “The work of a pure logician, my *Poetics*! By Zeus, how should it be anything else, since, properly understood, it is, and is intended to be, nothing but an appendix to my logic, an applied logic dealing with the manifestations and processes of poetical activity? Yes or no? Is the plot the mainspring of a tragedy? If the answer is yes, that mainspring has certain qualities which I am fully entitled to enumerate; it obeys at least implicitly certain rules which it is by no means useless to define for the benefit of young dramatists and critics. The same applies to the other elements I study; to all this matter realised in a poem which, although divinised by the *θεῖα δύναμις* of my master Socrates, remains none the less intelligible, and consequently definable. Do you reproach a doctor who names the different parts of a skeleton with denying life? He sticks to his duty as an anatomist, I to mine as a logician. You regret that I have submitted ‘poetry to the absolute yoke of reason’? Where the deuce did you see that? The verse about ‘reason alone’ being the principle of all

¹ Egger, *Essai sur l'histoire de la critique chez les Grecs* (Paris, 1886), p. 259.

poetic beauty was not written by me, as far as I am aware. I only submit to reason what belongs to it, what can and should find place under its categories. I do not in the least misunderstand, as you go on to say, the specific and ineffable character of poetic experience. I simply leave it alone, apart from my famous passage on the Catharsis—a rather obscure passage, I admit, but one day an entirely mystical philosophy of poetry will grow out of it.”

He speaks truly. There is no metaphysics, true or false, in his *Poetics*; no other heresy than the heresy of silence—the most dangerous of all, perhaps. Imagine a believer who, in relating the origins of Christianity, should never make any allusion, near or distant, to the Divinity of Jesus. A sin of omission only, but nevertheless a fraud. Assuredly Aristotle has not written a single line justifying the conclusion that he rejects the traditional view of the inspiration of the poet, and identifies poetic knowledge with rational; but neither has he written one—with the exception of the paragraph on the Catharsis—from which one may, I do not say conclude, but even suspect the contrary. Silence gives consent. A silence for ever lamentable, big with catastrophe, big with Boileau, if one may so express oneself.

CHAPTER III

THE HUMANISM OF THE RENAISSANCE AND THE RIDDLE OF THE CATHARSIS

“**P**OETRY, like all the arts, is essentially a ‘mystery.’ Its charm depends upon qualities which we can neither define accurately nor reduce to rule, nor create again at pleasure. Mankind, however, are unwilling to admit this; and they endeavour from time to time to persuade themselves that they have discovered the rules which will enable them to produce the desired effect.”¹ Doubtless Aristotle did not wish to be one of these men, but in fact he was, and one of the most influential. The man of rules and prescriptions, the dispenser of the divine gift, the Ruolz of poetry. Once more, he does not himself deny the mystery of poetry; like a conjuror he makes it vanish, and thus inevitably leads less subtle and more prosaic spirits to a formal negation. For this, however, time has been necessary. Aristotle’s deplorable discretion will be only too closely imitated, and the fundamental problem of æsthetics will long remain precisely at the point where the *Poetics* have left it. In theory, the necessity of inspiration will be admitted, but in practice, theorists and critics will

¹ F. W. H. Myers, *Wordsworth*, p. 105.

behave as if obedience to rules is sufficient to merit the name of poet. Here and there, however, we hear a few professions of anti-rationalist faith. Egger quotes some very fine ones in his *Histoire de la critique chez les Grecs*, and Mr. Saintsbury discusses with his customary ingenuity the Pre-Romanticism of Longinus, a detail into which we cannot enter here.

As M. Toffanin has admirably shown in his book *La fin de l'humanisme*, it was the Italian humanists of the Renaissance who at length definitely raised the question of poetic knowledge. *The end of Humanism*—in other words, the transition from the exclusive study of rules to metaphysical meditations on the mystery itself of Poetry—the end of Classicism, the first steps of Romanticism. It was a slow evolution. Too much importance was still attached to the formalist and intellectualist *bloc* of the Aristotelian teaching. The blind faith of the past in the efficacy of poetic recipes was still undisputed by unbelievers. But at last, without disputing the ritual observances due to the ancient idols according to tradition, men began to pause at length and with an already passionate curiosity on the threshold of the obscure chapel, so long forgotten, where the veiled statue of the Catharsis was hidden. Nothing is more interesting than to follow in M. Toffanin's fine book this laborious process, this emancipation of criticism and æsthetic, so full of fumbings, hesitations, and timid advances. Already men are sketching out that emancipating philosophy which three hundred years later, at the dawn of

Romanticism, another Italian, more of a genius and more of a mystic than our humanists, Alessandro Manzoni, will profess so brilliantly. Let us note here, in view of the parallel towards which I am working up, the marvellous resurrection of higher Christian mysticism which immediately preceded the Renaissance, which accompanied and perhaps helped it, and which is destined to survive it. On one side and the other, although at different levels, it is the same movement towards the interior, towards the living sources of the soul.

CHAPTER IV

BOILEAU

THEN came the classicist reaction, which prepared the way for the imminent explosion of rationalism. How explain this sudden halt, this falling back? Boileau names the chief criminal. It was Descartes, he says, who twisted the neck of poetry. But how shall we explain, in the first place, Descartes and his murderous tastes; and, in the second, how poetry made such a poor defence? If anyone were ever expressly constructed to play the part of an eccentric, it was surely Malherbe, and as he became leader of a school, must he not have had the whole of France for his accomplices? One after another, four plebiscites: Malherbe, Balzac, Voiture, Boileau. Not *vox Dei*, certainly, but assuredly *vox populi*. We can never forgive Boileau for having blasphemed Ronsard, yet who protested, save a handful of archaising fanatics? As for us Frenchmen, on the whole closed to a certain kind of poetry, let it pass. But that Boileau should have reigned under the name of Pope in the land that yesterday belonged to Shakespeare and tomorrow will belong to Wordsworth is quite unintelligible.

But, after all, they are but amateur heretics. Their

very genius resists the philosophy they teach which is being contradicted at every moment by their experience. How are they to manage to believe seriously in "reason only"? In particular Boileau, so little reasonable and self-possessed, a mere parcel of nerves and instincts, demoniac, in fact, and the least intelligent of the great classics. Reason is the last thing he thinks about. "At last came Malherbe . . ." Ah! no doubt to put reason in its place. Far from it—words only. Boileau, no doubt, has his little catechism, for he has meditated a great deal, not on the principles, but on the practice of his art. His dogma, however, is completely contradictory to the dogmas of the *Art Poétique*. What he holds is that the subject itself of the poem—the ideas, sentiments—have not the slightest importance. He writes, labouring over the *Satire des Femmes*: "It is a work which bores me to death on account of the multitude of its transitions, the hardest job in poetry."¹ The transitions of which he speaks are a mere trick of the pen, negligible from a rational point of view. In the *Ode sur Namur* "he has ventured on strange novelties," he tells us. What novelty? A bold idea, a profound reflection? No; he has gone "so far as to mention the white feather the king wears in his hat."²

When "reason only" holds the tiller—above all, "French reason," we have been told it often enough—the bark moves always towards more clarity. Now

¹ *Œuvres de Boileau* (Berriat St Prix), iv 253.

² *Op. cit.*, iv 265.

Boileau *qua* poet adores the obscure. One of his habitual methods is to express in prosaic fashion a clear and easy thought, and then proceed to drown it in a fog. Thus, after saying that as a "warlike poet" he has played the rôle of a soldier, he proceeds to amplify this thought, immediately intelligible to everyone, as follows:

*Sur les bords de l'Euphrate abattu le turban
Et coupé pour rimer les cèdres du Liban.*

Again:

Il est fâcheux, grand roi, de se voir sans lecteurs.

A thought so limpid as to require no further explanation for anyone. Not a bit of it; reason being satisfied, a poetical enigma must follow:

*Et d'aller du récit de ta gloire immortelle
Habiller chez Francœur le sucre et la cannelle.*

A luce ad tenebras! What a device for a worshipper of reason! My old classic heart is near to breaking when I reflect that there are only three or four of us left now who know and savour these beautiful obscurities. The neo-classicists reached the same depths, but their art was but tinsel. Here we have platitude in its pure state, the model pattern, the sacred canon from which so many young Frenchmen have "learnt . . . the height of the art of verse."

But it is in the wonderful letter to Maucroix that we must look for his authentic artistic confidences, his ideas, if we may so call them:

Malherbe's greatest excellence lies, in my judgement, in his way of saying little things, *and it is in this that he most closely resembles the ancients, who win my admiration chiefly by their skill in this matter.* The more insignificant and unsuitable for the poetic medium things are in themselves, the more striking they become when said nobly and with the elegance properly characteristic of poetry. . . . M. de la Fontaine has told me more than once that the two lines of my works which he admires the most are those in which I praise the king for having substituted for the manufacture of Venetian-point lace that of French-point:

Et nos voisins frustrés de ces tributs serviles
Que payait à leur art le luxe de nos villes.

Virgil and Horace are divine in this matter, as also Homer. As for me, when I write verse, I always try to say something not yet said in our language.

In extreme old age he comes back with the same love to "these little things" that constitute the whole of poetry, explaining to the docile Brossette how admirable are these two lines of the eighth satire:

Et souvent tel y vient qui sait pour tout secret:
Cinq et quatre font neuf; ôtez deux, reste sept.

All this seems, I hope, to the reader alarming in its puerility. But we must also see in it the naïve testimony rendered to poetry by a naturally poetic soul, an implicit but enthusiastic repudiation of rationalist æsthetic. Why, if its object be the same as that of

reason—to wit, truth—should the principal effort of poetry consist in handling insignificant ideas? It goes without saying, of course, that Boileau gives himself a totally wrong interpretation of his poetic experience. There is no question here of ideas, small or great. When inspiration seizes the poet, he tries as well as he can to pass it on into us, using for that end means which from the point of view of reason are neither small nor great, neither rich nor poor in thought. In place of the famous line:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,

Keats had first written:

A thing of beauty is a constant joy.

“A constant joy,” “a joy for ever”—between the two the intellectual nuance, if such there be, is infinitely small. Only, it is a verifiable fact that with *for ever* the current passes, and that with *constant* it does not. Not that this strange phenomenon necessarily escapes the investigations of science. The new methods will sooner or later explain it, in part at least. Certain laws, in themselves completely reasonable, direct, unbeknown to him, the poet, and oblige him to efface *constant* and replace it with *for ever*; and they are the same laws as those which, determining an infinitely grosser experience of the same order in Boileau’s case, dictate to *him* the so-called “little things” of which he was so proud:

Cinq et quatre font neuf; ôtez deux, reste sept.

But these laws have nothing in common with the rules of the "Art de Penser." Left to its own resources, reason will never realise either the mediocrity, the prosaism of "constant joy," or the poetic value of "joy for ever."

CHAPTER V

LAMOTTE AND THE TRIUMPH OF CLASSICISM

IT would be cruel, brutal even, to place Boileau for his first philosophy lesson in front of a dilemma. Choose; if you continue to defend the rationalist æsthetic of the *Art Poétique*, the suprarational and, on the whole, fairly poetical æsthetic of your letter to Maucroix falls to the ground. And inversely. But what can we do? Dilemmas are written all over the sky of pure ideas. Moreover, Boileau's descendants, the eighteenth century classicists, have not waited for us to strip bare the contradictions of their patriarch. More ferocious than we are, they even go so far as to say to him: "You must choose between your oracle of 'reason only' (which, as a matter of fact, suits us very well) and your complete works, including *Lutrin*." They destroy each other. Thus Voltaire himself. "What do I care," he cries:

Qu'il peigne de Paris les tristes embarras,
Ou décrive en beaux vers un fort mauvais repas !
IL FAUT D'AUTRES OBJETS À NOTRE INTELLIGENCE.

Evidently! To digest Boileau, "our intelligence" must have no other possible food. And yet Boileau is no less a poet than Voltaire. Oh! I quite under-

stand that Laharpe, in his turn, will not hesitate to deliver a counter-exorcism. There is no question here of intelligence, says he, but of "versification," taste, and style;¹ in short, of an extra-rational pleasure.

But is it not precisely this sort of pleasure that the *Art Poétique* condemns? Marmontel, who considers the *Satires* "rather bad," is more logical, or M. de Villette, in this eloquent passage:

How can he (Boileau) not at least have had a presentiment of the force, the energy which could be given to the art of verse by feeding it on the great ideas of a universal morality and a sound philosophy? . . . How is it that Boileau . . . never concerned himself with the progress of light and the forward march of the human spirit?

To which Laharpe, by turn an *enfant terrible*, an impenitent Voltairean, a shy romantic, but nearly always a man of taste, retorts:

If this reproach were well founded, it could be addressed to all the great poets of his century. Voltaire . . . is the first who applied the art of verse to philosophy, to the frequent abuse of both.

Abuse? What does he mean? If intelligence is everything, one will never be too intelligent.

In the forward march of the human spirit, imagination precedes reflection, and the fine arts are always ahead of philosophy.

¹ Laharpe, vi, p. 19.

This is perfect; but still too timid, and consequently very dangerous. The reply of rationalism is obvious: the adult need no nurse. We quite understand; the infant world was capable of nothing but poetry. Today we can, and ought to, do without it; we have something better, philosophy.

"Every one in his turn," cries Fontenelle. That modern poets should be "philosophers rather than poets has in it nothing either astonishing or afflicting."¹

Such are the inescapable premisses of the blasphemy hatched at the end of the classic golden age by Corneille's nephew, who had one of the clearest brains that ever existed, and who was to enjoy the cheerful loyalty of the best minds of the eighteenth century.

Fontenelle must not be judged by his immediate disciples, a Lamotte or a Trublet, who have diminished him to their own stature. His æsthetic, strange to say, is much the same as Plato's: a duel between the *θεῖα δύναμις* and the *σοφία*, inspiration and reason. He is not the man to fight a ghost. He knows very well that, unless recourse be had to some supra-rational or mystical factor, the poetic phenomenon remains unexplained. But all mysticism irritates him, causes him shame and fear; he employs all his marvellous subtlety to exile it, to reduce it to nothing.

"No one knows," he writes, "what to make of Æschylus' *Prometheus*. It has neither subject nor design; it is but a series of very poetical and very bold

¹ W. Folkierski, *Entre le classicisme et le romantisme* (Cracow and Paris, 1925), pp. 1, 96.

extravagances. I think that Æschylus was a sort of lunatic who had a lively and insufficiently disciplined imagination."¹

And, again, with a sort of anger:

What! shall that be esteemed the highest in us, *which is what depends least on ourselves*, which acts the more powerfully in us that it is without our consent, which is most conformed to the instinct of animals? For this enthusiasm and rage, when properly explained, are reduced to veritable instincts.²

The case is the same with talent, which is but an instinct.

We understand by the word talent a certain imperious and lucky movement, which carries us towards certain objects, and causes us to seize them accurately *without* any need of the help of reflection. I say "any need," because in so far as there is any such need, so much must be struck off the merit and the essence of the talent. . . . When a poet has been accused of being more of a philosopher than a poet, he may as well be accused of having more intelligence than talent; the one charge follows from the other. In practical life, talent is not often met without intelligence, or intelligence without talent; the only question is which is the stronger force. If it is necessary that one or other should dominate, I think that we cannot hesitate to give the victory to intelligence. . . . *Talent is as if independent of us, and its operations seem to have been produced in us by some superior being who has done us the honour to choose us for his instruments.* As

¹ *Mémoires de Trublet*, in Folkiński, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

² Folkiński, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

for what is called intelligence, it is nothing but us; we feel clearly enough that it is ourselves who are in action. The difficulty and the slowness of its operations do not allow us to ignore this. That is the cause of the preference willingly given to talent over intelligence; for human reason, which is often too proud, may also sometimes be too humble.¹

“Too humble”; the great confession is made. We are not pleased by a mystical explanation of poetry, because that explanation lowers our pride as reasonable men. But what a pleasure it is to deal with so intelligent a man! “Intellectualists,” as a rule, are so rarely intelligent. Fontenelle foresees and divines everything, even what we call, since Baudelaire, the “magic” of verse.

It sometimes happens that irregular pieces like the *Cid* do not fail to please extremely; when we read it we begin to despise the rules (to say that poetry is not reason); rules, we say, are but tiresome and useless pedantry, and there is a certain art of pleasing which is above everything. But what is this art of pleasing? It cannot be defined (Bravo!); it is attained by chance; one is never sure of catching it twice; *it is an altogether unknown kind of magic*. Perhaps all that may not be true. There is a good deal of ground for thinking that when irregular pieces give pleasure, it is not by their irregular passages that they do so.

And there is still more ground for thinking that when the pieces which profess to be regular please,

¹ Folkierski, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-198.

the particular pleasure they give is not due to this conformity with the rules:

And it is certain that there is no piece on the stage which in certain respects is so regular as the *Cid*.

Does the charm of the *Cid* come from this irregularity?

But it might well be that important points for the art of the theatre have not yet been reduced to rules; or, at least, are not well known. Apparently the art of pleasing, the secret of this magic, consists in these rules, which are not yet made, or not as yet familiar.¹

These rules, which the poet ignores and unconsciously obeys, are not, properly speaking, rules at all; neither the reason nor the choice of the poet has drawn them up, and to this fact precisely is due this magic power.

Lamotte, who had so long and deplorable an influence on the literary ideas of his time, did little else but popularise the still hesitating rationalism of Fontenelle, underlining it at every opportunity, amplifying it with less intelligence than logic, stripping it of the subtle reservations which we have mentioned, and which mitigated its venom. Lamotte, moreover, was a charming person and a model Academician. His shade would often come to cheer me up, a year or two ago, on the morrow of my academic discourse on "Pure Poetry," embarrassed as I felt by the compliments of some and the fury of others, the former

¹ *Reflections on Poetics.*

praising my courage, the latter blaming my colleagues for having listened to such enormities without protest. The same thing happened two centuries ago to the impossible Mme. Dacier:

And the Academy is silent, she cried, the Academy does not rise to protest against this excessive injury. I know, indeed, that there are some who grieve over this attack . . ., but the indignation of a section does not justify the whole body; the public expected something better from this company. I do not wish to rouse against M. de Lamotte such dangerous enemies. Charity forbids me.

To which Lamotte replied with his habitual urbanity:

This passage makes one smile by the gravity and pathos of its terms . . . applied to so frivolous a matter; but it also gives pain by the extraordinary spirit which inspires it [extraordinary at that time!]. She says all she can to rouse the Academy against me, and when she has said everything, she wants to say she stops because charity forbids her to do me an injury. . . . A patient charity, forsooth, which waits to make its voice heard until passion has been exhausted.

A fine couplet follows, which we all know by heart at the Academy, but which had no doubt been forgotten by those who were kind enough to admire my independence:

I take this opportunity of informing Mme. Dacier that she has a false idea of the French Academy. She looks upon it, apparently, as a tyrannical tribunal

which permits no liberty of opinion concerning works of the intelligence; she believes that a religious admiration of the ancients is one of its fundamental laws, and that, on entering, an Academician has to take an oath of fidelity in this respect. Such is not the spirit of a society of men of letters, and the Academy tends to uniformity only by the path of enlightenment, and not by the path of constraint. The Academy has suffered from the first days of its establishment from the fact that the Abbé de Bois-Robert compared the Greek singer with our street artists, who only serve their songs to the rabble. Our founder, who presumably took the right view of his own situation, was not scandalised. It has since suffered because Desmarets made a dissertation [which I am supposed to have copied] against Homer. It did not rise against M. Perrault . . . it permitted M. de Fontenelle to point out faults in Theocritus and Virgil. . . .

And it permits me today to oppose Wordsworth, Edgar Poe, even Mallarmé, to the rationalist paradoxes of Lamotte.

In a word, in these disputes it condemns nothing but the bad manners with which the various parties sometimes fortify their reasons. Apart from that, what better can it desire than this diversity of opinion which enables matters to be thoroughly penetrated? The time of all our assemblies is passed in these useful contradictions from which truth results . . . when everything has been said from every point of view, reason insensibly does its work, taste grows perfect.

There are no conciliar definitions. We say what we like,

And it is for the public, the judge of the Academy itself, to give the decision.¹

What we have now to quote from Lamotte is less agreeable; on the other hand, no more decisive word has been pronounced on our problem, nothing which shows better the logical term of rationalist æsthetic:

Break up the measure of Racine's verses, abolish his rhymes—he wrote in his *Discourse on the Tragedy of Œdipus*, a characteristic piece of his, and in verse—and you will find in the arguments nothing but a natural elegance proportioned to the ranks, the interests, the passions presented. *You will lose nothing*, in a word, *but that studied artifice* which, by distracting you from the actor, makes you admire the poet, and which would appear nothing but an *abuse of language* to any man of good sense who might never have heard any verses at all.²

The idea shortly occurred to him to render this truth evident through an experiment which the least subtle person could make and control. “He turned into prose the first scene of *Mithridate*, printed Racine's verses opposite his own version, and, being entirely convinced that the original text could be in no way superior to his own, appealed on the point to the judgement of the public.”

¹ *The Literary Paradoxes of Lamotte, or the Discourses composed by that Academician on the Principal Kinds of Poems*, collected and annotated by B. Jullien (Paris, 1859), pp. 293-295.

² *Paradoxes*, p. 13.

Let the reader now verify the effect produced on him by this scene as he has just read it, comparing with it the effect of the same scene written in verse, and I will ask him whether all the tragedies of Racine turned into prose with the same *exact reproduction of the author's thoughts*, his phrases, and his modes of expression . . . would make the same impression of beauty. . . .

Some will, perhaps, reply that their esteem for the idea of the work and the writer will have lost nothing. To them I have nothing to say. I can only congratulate them on the strength and uprightness of their judgement, which is such that they are incapable of seduction. But I am addressing myself to by far the greater number of readers: to those who would find that these tragedies lost considerably in value; to those for whom, through the mere change of style, they would become commonplace. . . . To them I say, what I said to myself when I caught myself making the same mistake, that we do not value sufficiently what is really valuable, and that we judge too highly what scarcely deserves—in fact, what does not at all deserve—our admiration.

That is to say, quite simply, poetry itself.

What constitutes the solid quality of a piece of work if it be not the *justice of the thoughts interconnected by the best possible arrangement* . . . and the choice of the most apt expressions to transmit exactly into the intelligence of others the *ideas* that one wishes to give them? That is what *reason*, *eloquence*, and perfect knowledge should do, and it is, moreover, the only *legitimate use to make of a language*. When that is done, what remains in a work for the *intelligence* to estimate?

Absolutely nothing. I am entirely of that opinion, which must be shared by every reasonable being. Prose is sufficient for everything which the intelligence wishes to say. If poetic knowledge is indistinguishable from rational knowledge, *Mithridate* is no more poetic in verse than in prose. Manifestly, versification is no more than an "accessory merit." "Extravagance on the part of those who impose this yoke, and an equally frivolous and painful labour on the part of those who accept it." If you admit the premisses of rationalist æsthetic, there is no way out of it.

Imagine for a moment that a man has composed a tragedy, perfect "from the point of view of reason" in every way, but in prose. Someone comes and says to him, "Sir, your work is reasonable; the action of your piece is well chosen and well carried out; all your sentiments elevate the spirit and touch the heart; your personages say to each other exactly what they ought to say. . . .

Your work is, nevertheless, only sketched out.

. . . Do you wish to give it an immortal and sublime beauty? Reduce all your thoughts to a uniform measure. . . . If you fulfil this condition, from the excellent genius which you appear to be already . . ., you will become a great man; but be sure you change nothing in your phrases and your expressions, for they are good; add nothing, take nothing away, for they are precise." Can a more ridiculous proposition be conceived? But what will happen to the man to whom it has been made? . . . He has nothing left to think about; all the intelligence which should

be in his work is already found; nothing remains for him to do, save to exercise a mechanical and contemptible labour. . . .

Can this be the exercise of reason ?

No, a thousand times no. And Lamotte is perfectly right in advancing "that prose can say all that verses can say,"¹ meaning by that that prose can express all the ideas expressed by verse.

Not only do I venture to believe that a prose, I do not say bold, but proportional to the personages and subject with which it deals, would give us an adequate picture of the passions; I even venture to express my astonishment that this should be disputed.²

To contest this is indeed a pure sophism. Shall we object that he is insensible to poetic seduction ? Alas, he is only too sensitive to it. He is merely ashamed to yield once more to an "illusion," the inanity of which his reason has demonstrated to him.

M. de la Faye takes against me the side of the verses, which I only *abjure qua philosopher*, and which, in spite of my reflections, give me as much pleasure as they do to him.³

After all, he does not absolutely deny—

that there may be in verses some other cause of pleasure (than their conformity to the laws of reason); *but the question is not worth the trouble of a profound metaphysical inquiry.*⁴

¹ *Paradoxes*, p. 29.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Ah! this is the real, the only question. This is the "heroic leap" of which Mr. Middleton Murry was speaking to us lately. Lamotte will not take it. He will not, however, go so far as to refuse extenuating circumstances to those who do.

What is the conclusion of all that I have said? Do not let us go to the extreme limit shown us by harsh reason. Indulgence must be allowed to habit. Let us encourage the versifiers, let us attach glory to the trouble they take in order to conceal from them the puerility of their task. Finally, let us keep our verses, because they give pleasure to many. But, since there are others for whom this pleasure is not so necessary . . . let us make prose free of every theme. . . .

This is the supreme humiliation. Of old, terror, which was a kind of homage; today contempt. Plato banished poets, Lamotte shuts them up in the nursery, aged babies from whom one is not so cruel as to steal their swords, and who, moreover, are not altogether useless to the republic. Thinkers may even find pleasure and recreation in reading the childish elucubrations of poets; they will never find in them more than a half-truth, sometimes justified by its gracefulness.

The ordinary excuse for licence in verses is that it is good enough for poetry. It is as if one should say: This is not really good, but remember that we are talking of verses; and that is precisely the justification of the ill-tempered philosopher's complaint—namely, that a style of writing should be permitted in which one may speak inexactly.¹

¹ *Paradoxes*, pp. 47-48.

Once more, absurd but logical. With magnificent intrepidity he proclaims what all his co-religionists, the faithful of the Church of reason, should also, inasmuch as they implicitly admit it, declare. The Abbé Trublet, no fool either, says more succinctly:

The greater the perfection to which reason attains, the more the judgement is preferred to the imagination; and consequently, the less poets are appreciated. The first writers, it is said, were poets. I believe it; *they could hardly have been anything else*; the last writers will be philosophers.¹

And these, freer in spirit, more disinterested, indeed, than Fontenelle and Lamotte, will make great fun of poetry. Such, for example, to the great scandal of Laharpe, "Mariveaux, Duclos, Condillac, Montesquieu." "Buffon, at least," adds Laharpe, "had the prudence to write nothing on the subject, but he referred to it so frequently in conversation that his opinion was well known."²

¹ Quoted by Folkierski, p. 196.

² Laharpe, xii, p. 167. Quoted and criticised by B. Jullien, *Les formes harmoniques du français* (Paris, 1876), pp. 97-100. It is useless to add that, even among philosophers, unanimity was not reached on this point. I even believe that it would not be hard to find the remains of faith in the minds of some of the blasphemers denounced by Laharpe. Reflect, for instance, on these beautiful lines by Condillac: "Do you wish to know the difference between poetry and prose . . . read the great writers, *feel* them, scrutinise them, compare them. *But do not undertake to define the impressions which they produce in you; beware, indeed, of analysing them too closely. It must be admitted*

that nothing is so contrary to fine taste as the philosophic spirit ; there is a truth here which escapes me," and which makes a clean sweep of the whole æsthetic of reasoned poetry. "We . . . distinguish poetical style through the pleasure it causes us . . . nothing more can be said . . . it is useless to attempt to discover the essence of poetical style. It has none. Too arbitrary to possess one, it depends on association of ideas, which vary like the spirit of great poets" (*Art d'écrire*, pp. 369-371). I infinitely regret that I did not know this admirable work when I was teaching the Humanities. I note, in passing, a gorgeous absurdity: "a religion (our own) which does not speak to the senses cannot enrich the language of poetry" (*ibid.*, p. 376). Even Buffon, although a stout contemner of verse, has perhaps outlined a mystical theory of poetry: "All the intellectual beauties (pardon the phrase) which are to be found (in a fine style), all the relations which compose it, are so many truths (?), as useful as, and *perhaps more precious* for the public spirit, than those which make up the *fond* of the subject," more precious, therefore, than the truths, properly so called, the writer has expressed. Flaubert quotes these lines, dear to Bouillet, in the preface of *Dernières chansons*. Compare Cassagne, *La théorie de l'art pour l'art*.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUPREME HUMILIATION OF POETRY

AT the risk of being suspected of clericalism,¹ I will add a few Jesuits to this list of apostates, as Mme. Dacier would say. Apostates twice over, indeed, since at one and the same time they outrage poetry and break one of the holiest rules of their *Ratio Studiorum*. Let us, moreover, not forget that this code directed for at least two centuries the literary and poetical formation of French youth; nor yet that the fundamental exercise of the *Ratio*, the *Praelectio*, as we used to call it, is a "mystical" initiation, if ever there were one. Let us take the *Phaselus* of Catullus. As Professor of Poetry, I must begin by putting myself in accord with reason, and, in

¹ Well, yes! Only by naming, in my essay on Pure Poetry, Père Rapin, S.J., I scandalised M. Paul Souday, the illustrious critic of *Le Temps*. These pre-occupations, so degrading to the art of letters, should be noted when, at rare intervals, they still venture into the open. At the beginning of my "Discours de Réception" at the Academy, I had quoted with friendly appreciation a fine text on criticism by the Huguenot minister, Jean Daillé, and, in doing so, I did not scandalise even *non-liberal* Catholics; in another discourse I quote the Jesuit Rapin, a delightful writer of whom no cultured person should be ignorant, and the critic of *Le Temps* charges the scarecrow like a mad bull.

order to do so, I have to translate the *Phasclus*, precisely as Lamotte the first scene of *Mithridate*, into a prose as limpid as possible—Latin, of course—and which renders the *ensemble* and details accessible, in so far as this short *chef-d'œuvre* possesses an *intelligible* content, to the intelligence of my pupils. In this case there is, indeed, not much to do, but in order that the reason should be fully gorged and keep quiet, I will add a quantity of interesting explanations to the extent of drawing on the blackboard the adventures of the little boat from the distant *silva nobilis*, from whence came the planks out of which it was built, to the shore on which, broken up with old age, it presented itself to the melancholy meditations of Catullus. *Sed haec prius fuere. . . .* After which, and here comes the solemn moment, we take the “heroic leap,” resolutely abandoning the curiosities of a rational knowledge for the confused joys of poetical knowledge, endeavouring that the deeper soul of our pupils should open of itself to that current of which we have so often spoken, but of which we shall never speak too much. It is thus, at least, that I have always understood and practised the *Ratio*, following faithfully the directions of the humanists of the Renaissance, whose heritage the great Jesuits have handed down to us, a tradition which rests altogether in the last analysis on the doctrine of the Catharsis vividly realised and ardently lived, even if not explained according to the rules of philosophers. It is *au fond* the excellent chapter of Bouhours on the *Je ne sais quoi*;

it is the relatively clear affirmation of Rapin in his *Réflexions sur la poétique d'Aristote*.

Alas! there is no doubt about it, the eighteenth century Jesuits were unable to resist the infiltrations of rationalism. They wished no ill to Fontenelle, seduction in person; they read Lamotte without tearing their soutanes in horror. These dishonoured amphoras, nevertheless, keep something of the perfume which once filled them. Before their Père Buffier definitely at last proclaims the failure of poetry, we shall have their Ducerceau.¹

Do not hunt for this little book, which, on the strength of its title, and spurred on by I know not what presentiment, I have sought in vain from all the Jesuits in France, and which I eventually had to take out of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. Since it equally offends rationalists and mystics—the former, however, more than the latter—it has been suppressed. The few modern savants who refer to it either do not know it or have read it too quickly. At once absurd and delightful, the more delightful for its absurdity, the more profound for its apparent frivolity, I wish at length to pay this book a homage which for two centuries it has been refused by general agreement.

Absurd. But with grace, irony, good sense. It will only irritate fools. I will not insult Père Ducer-

¹ *Réflexions sur la poésie française où l'on fait voir en quoi consiste la beauté des vers et où l'on donne des règles sûres pour réussir à les bien faire; avec une défense de la poésie et une apologie pour les savants*, par R. P. Ducerceau, de la Compagnie de Jésus (Paris, 1742).

ceau by comparing him with Lamotte. An ocean separates them. In the republic of letters Lamotte remains a half-breed, still less, a pariah; the perfect type of the unlettered superior person, a gilded plebeian of a race well known and too fertile. Not, indeed, that he lacks intelligence; he has nothing else; not that he writes badly, he writes it like a man who does not belong to the family and never will. There is a long way from Voltaire to Ducerceau, but conversation is possible—even easy; they speak the same language. A duke and peer and an *honnête homme*: Louis XIV and Pellisson. From Lamotte to Ducerceau there is no bridge.

Even in the temerities of the Jesuit as in those of Fénelon, that prince of letters, the man of taste is revealed. He writes, for instance:

It is admitted that verses are more pleasing than prose; nevertheless, if the only points distinguishing them from prose were measure and rhyme, they ought to give infinitely less pleasure. That uniform monotony has something in itself so disagreeable that, other things being equal, the advantage ought to be entirely on the side of the style least affected by it.

Here we have the fastidiousness of the true *lettré*. When both Lamotte and he vaunt the pleasure that fine verse gives us we feel at once, I know not why, that the former speaks of a gross, the second of an exquisite joy.¹

¹ His judgement on the respective merits of Latin and French is very curious. He prefers our construction. "If you put in a heap all the parts of a Latin phrase in a hat, and

The late Abbé Regnier, who, among those of our poets who have a reputation, is in my opinion the one whose poetry smells the most of prose.¹

This phrase would have been unintelligible to Lamotte; the meaning of "to smell of prose" he

draw them one after another at hazard, like lottery tickets, the construction of the sentence will always remain more or less; in any case sufficiently regular." French is rebuked for demanding a narrower and closer development. "I shall make no difficulty about agreeing when I have been made to understand that to speak in the order of thought is a mistake." On the other hand, these perfectly just lines, in my judgement, solve the question of Latin: "I admire it less in the construction of each particular phrase than in the liaison of phrases woven into the tissue of the discourse, and a natural and easy order in which a piece of reasoning or a narrative is developed with all its elements in their right places. In this Latin is infinitely superior to French," and Cicero to Flaubert. Equally interesting is his profession of anti-dogmatic, anti-intellectualist faith; before quoting some verses from Mme. Deshoulières, he says: "If I may be permitted to express my opinion on these works, I will confess that I know no one, without even excepting our greatest poets, who has attained better than this illustrious lady to the true taste of French poetry, and who has better expressed it in verse." He only compares her to the greatest from this point of view, but that is not what should arrest our attention. He continues: "There are people who think that her manner of writing verse is contrary to my principles. If *that* were so, I would abandon my principles, and, given my conviction that the turn she gives her verses is the authentic turn suited to our poetry, I could not do otherwise than reject as false all the rules that might not square with it" (Ducerceau, *op. cit.*, p. 321).

¹ *Réflexions*, p. 311.

will never know. Almost alone among his contemporaries, Ducerceau appreciates Ronsard:

I think that Ronsard does not receive all the justice he deserves . . . he had, after all, excellent qualifications for poetry: plenty of intelligence and imagination, fire, enthusiasm, much reading, and a considerable knowledge of the ancients.¹

But let us come to his doctrine:

We have no means, he writes in the beginning of his book, of distinguishing the essential difference of style in prose and in verse.

We should put the problem differently today, but no matter. This difference should not be looked for, he continues, either in the rhyme or the measure:

No more can the distinction be referred to the difference of terms and the nobility of expression.

With these two lines you see, I hope, that the classical æsthetic falls to the ground:

Since the terms are common both to verse and prose, and all those which are received in good prose are equally correct in good verse. *I say the same of the bold and sublime figures, which poetry does but borrow from rhetoric, where they properly belong, and for which the poets ought to acknowledge themselves indebted to the orators.*²

And again:

Nobility, finesse, delicacy, and vivacity of expression should not be considered as the essential

¹ *Réflexions*, p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 13.

matter of poetic style. With this matter alone, something beautiful, fine, lively, elevated, magnificent may be made . . . *but not poetry; something else is needed to animate that matter.*

Our minds, moulded by the anathemas of Poe and Baudelaire against eloquence, or, which comes to the same thing, against didacticism, too little familiar, moreover, with the rhetoricians of the *ancien régime*, perhaps we do not sufficiently appreciate the originality, the courage of that memorable affirmation: "something else is needed."

Unfortunately, Ducerceau persists in seeking this "something" which animates, not among the living, which the very metaphor he had adopted invited him to do, but among the dead. I mean among those rigid, inert, clearly definable elements which absorb the study of the ancient rhetoric, and over whose mechanism the *σοφία*, reason, the æsthetic of rules and recipes alone presided. The "something" is only a "turn of the phrase" in the most mechanical sense of the word.

There is, he says, one turn of the phrase which is poetic, and one which is prosaic . . . the latter, in spite of the most exact measure and the richest rhyme, remains always *au fond* authentically prose; while the former, without rhyme or measure, is always really poetry.

Here he seems, if I may say so, to be "burning," as in the children's game; but no, let us not give way to a premature and unjustified joy.

What is this turn of the phrase which is proper to poetry, and distinguishes verse from prose? It is solely the trick of suspending the meaning of the phrase by making use of inversions or transpositions familiar to the language, and which do no violence to its construction.¹

Ridiculus mus! Thus, instead of the distich:

D'abord il a tenté les atteintes mortelles
Des poisons que lui-même a cru les plus fidèles,

Ducerceau proposes:

D'abord, de ces poisons qu'il crut les plus fidèles,
Mithridate a tenté les atteintes mortelles. . . .

He adds a quantity of analogous modifications, or rather inversions, almost always successful and sometimes impressive; but his card-castle is upset by a single incontestably poetical verse, the logical construction of which is observed with rigour, such as: *Mignonne, allons voir; Je suis le ténébreux . . . Le jour n'est pas plus pur . . .*

Prose, he says again, usually begins by the principal word of the phrase . . . poetry by the element least essential to the meaning. The first term to be presented always implies another, on which it absolutely depends, and which may perhaps not appear until the end of the period. Everything often remains in the air in the first verse . . . like an intrigue on the stage . . . and this is what produces that suspense of mind proper to verse, and to which prose, as M. de Cambrai admits, cannot aspire.² I consider that suspense of

¹ *Réflexions*, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

mind to be the soul of verse, and what makes its charm by the expectation and the surprise it causes. By this means the mind of the reader is kept in a state of constant expectation until the essential word, the key, as it were, of the sentence, has at last determined its meaning.¹

Where we find suspense of mind, we find a poetical effect.

I repeat it: when Lamotte speaks of poetry, one may, one should shrug one's shoulders, await the end of his remarks, or treat him like a helot, as we have done. Ducerceau, no. It is not even enough to refute him; in any case, too easy a task. There are particles of gold in even his least plausible errors, and perhaps the gravest fault of his analysis is that it stops half-way. Some presentiment of the truth always animates and inspires the worst heresies of a man of taste.

It may, indeed, be true that a certain "suspense" is the soul of poetry; but not that purely grammatical suspense of which Ducerceau speaks, which is in truth nothing but a symbol or a factor, among several others, of the true poetical "suspense." And I am inclined to think that Ducerceau glimpsed this, at least, confusedly. Meditate on the following remarkable lines in which he endeavours painfully, and, moreover, quite unsuccessfully, to *derationalise* his "suspense":

Poetry demands suspense, and not [intellectual] incertitude—two impressions which must not be con-

¹ *Réflexions*, p. 25.

fused. Incertitude is the wider term, and includes suspense, of which it corrodes the pleasure by the pain and perplexity which it adds to it; but *suspense* does imply incertitude. The idea of it gives us a merely agreeable expectation of what it promises, and puts us in the position more or less of partly guessing what is coming . . .; it offers us the pure pleasure of guessing without risk of error.

This is very moving. He is on the point of "taking the leap," of clearing the dark ditch which separates rational from poetical knowledge, and he suddenly takes fright; he has heard Boileau scolding him; he withdraws, and, with one foot in the ditch, he clings to the idea of "guessing," and thereby returns to the safe trenches of σοφία. And there we are back again among canonical puerilities; if the purpose of poetry is to propose for our solution easy riddles, it is nothing but a game of charades for backward children. Philosophers have every right to despise it.

All poetry is "suspense," at least in the sense that, at the origin of every poetical experience, an emotion of suspense is produced in the reader; it does not consist in the grammatical inversion of which Ducerceau speaks. The effect of which is slightly to stimulate and pique or amuse the intelligence—a purely pedagogical trick belonging to the domain of eloquence, and nothing to do with poetry. In the case of poetry, the intelligence itself is suspended, having been abruptly ordered to slacken its own activity so as not to obstruct the deeper activities, which have announced by a certain psychological confusion that they are

ready to come on the stage. This confusion is precisely the "agreeable expectation" of which Ducerceau speaks so well on the basis of an experience which he has enjoyed thousands of times, but which he analyses badly. Briefly, to come back to the parable of Claudel, *Animus* is silent in order to let *Anima* sing. That grammatical inversions may sometimes, even often—not, however, always—collaborate in the production of the desired incantation, in the transmission of the current, in the creation of a state of agreeable expectation, is very true, but no more so than it is of the choice and position of words—in fact, of all imaginable means of expression, whether grammatical or rhetorical—from which is apparent, it may be remarked in passing, that it would be easy to adapt to our present-day views of æsthetics, not, indeed, their frivolous philosophy, but the technical researches of the ancient rhetoricians; their fine analyses contain authentic treasures which might well be exploited by the critics and the professors of today.

But we must beware of confusing the means with the end, a "turn of phrase," whatever it be, with poetry itself, as our Ducerceau too manifestly does. Still more radically guilty—I mean more frivolous and more contemptuous—is the eminent Père Buffier, a philosopher, and the author of a philosophical and practical treatise on poetry. "Poetry," he writes, "is a poor thing."

An amusement of the mind and a means to dispose it to other occupations.

However advantageous the habitual practice of poetry may be in the first years of youth, it scarcely belongs to a more advanced age. . . . When we are older, it is no more the time to employ our mind in tricks of thought or expression . . . so that poetry seems to be in the same relation to the mind as dancing is to the body. We teach children to dance in order to form their bodies by means of the suppleness which the varied movements of dancing will give them, but when the time of youth is passed, dancing is only an *amusement*.¹

Poetry an amusement—that is the great discovery of the eighteenth century, such the crushing heritage of classicism.

¹ *Traité philosophique et pratique*, pp. 52-54.

CHAPTER VII

ROMANTICISM AND THE RESTORATION OF POETRY

ROMANTICISM is the return to the constant tradition of the human race in the matter of poetry, a conscious and reasoned reaction against the rationalist æsthetic of the eighteenth century and the senile humanism which had prepared the road for that æsthetic. To take poetry seriously, as a free and splendid gift which lifts the poet above himself for his own and everyone else's greater good, is the very essence of romanticism, its *élan vital*, its law—*non scripta sed nata*—and its invincible justification.

Aristotle had already said: "Poetry is more serious than history"; and Fénelon: "Poetry is more useful and more serious than people think." They meant by that that the reading of the *Iliad* is not a frivolous occupation, but more serious than the reading of the masterpieces of philosophy or history. Romanticism is naturally of the same opinion, but does not confine itself to the mere statement. If, the romantics reason, the *Iliad* is a more serious work than the history of the Peloponnesian War, it is because the poetical activity of Homer is superior to the quite different activity of Thucydides. From which they concluded

that what had now to be taken seriously, penetrated, and exalted even more than the very masterpieces of poetry, was the mysterious experience which lies at the root of these masterpieces: the interior principle, the poetic gift, and the invisible springs of action which that gift sets in motion. Such is the ardent and uneasy preoccupation of romanticism, if not always explicitly avowed, at least always in action; for the ancient criticism of beauties and defects, for the science of rules and recipes, something new is substituted: an æsthetic, an experimental and metaphysical science of poetry itself—an æsthetic which remains purely lyrical with many, principally with most of the French romantics; purely doctrinal with others, like Mme. de Staël; at once lyrical and doctrinal with some, such as Manzoni, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Schiller, and Lamartine.

All that which may at first sight seem more or less systematic and therefore arbitrary—in fact, partial—I could easily prove with due method and in strict conformity with the directions and examples cited by M. Lanson. But as I am not on this occasion writing a thesis for a doctorate, I shall content myself with a few texts which I fancy are not very well known, that the idea I have in my mind counsels me to select.¹ Why not Charles Magnin? He belongs to

¹ For a more scientific study of the subject I will refer the reader to some special books. Here are the most recent ones: G. Toffanin (Professor at the University of Cagliari), *La Fine del Umanesimo* (Turin, 1920); *L'Eredità del Rinascimento in Arcadia* (Bologna, 1923)—two masterly works

the *Globe*, and to say that he is worthy to do so is to say everything. As a critic, he is obviously very inferior to his friend Sainte-Beuve. He is less sure in taste, but less narrowly French, and what makes him more significant, more interested in metaphysics. He dealt several times with our problem, notably in an article of the *Revue des deux Mondes* (December 1, 1833): "Ahasuerus, a Mystery by M. Edgar Quinet, and the Nature of Poetic Genius." In those days the

which I cannot sufficiently praise. Of primary importance also, is the long chapter, "Manzoni, Shakespeare, and Bossuet," in the *Saggi e Studi* (Bologna, 1916) of M. A. Galletti. Equally indispensable are the *Studies in the Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1923) of J. G. Robertson. Like M. Toffanin, with whom, however, he does not always agree, Mr. Robertson aims at showing that the glory of having dispossessed reason from its privileged place as the supreme arbiter of poetry, and of thereby having prepared the way for the romantic renaissance both in England and Germany, belongs to Italian humanism. I have already quoted M. Folkierski's book, *Entre le classicisme et le romantisme* (Cracow, 1905). He is a little confused, but has realised the importance in France of Diderot and of Burke in England. It is odd that Mr. Robertson overlooks them both.

It is unnecessary to mention the well-known studies centring in the *Revue de littérature comparée*, such as, in the *Pre-Romanticism* (Paris, 1924) of M. Van Tieghem, the chapter on the "Notion of True Poetry in European Pre-Romanticism." There are treasures in the correspondence of Schiller, admirably translated and annotated by M. Lucien Herr (collection Du Bos), but I have not yet had time to assimilate them. M. Lombard's book on the Abbé Du Bos (Paris, 1913) is equally indispensable.

subject was not banal, and, if I remember, the article did not pass unobserved.

It is already, in less cautious and more petulant terms, my own little *discours* of 1925. He even steals my magnetic images. At that date, this is very curious.

In order to express, he says, *the singular and in a sense electrical sensations* caused us by such creations as those of Hoffmann, a word was wanting in our language; the phrase, *a fantastic work*, has been adopted for this purpose in our days. The ancient, the proper word of *poetry* was not sufficient. It has served too long to designate productions which no longer, as once upon a time, excite in us *that delicious shudder which it is the nature of poetry to give us*. We certainly need two words: one to express *that sort of galvanic sensation* which the poetry of our own day produces on us, and another to express the impression received from past poetry, the poetry of yesterday, in which surprise and novelty no longer play a part.

Of course, this distinction is a heresy which ingenuously betrays the Bœotian side of Magnin. There is no "past poetry"; true poetry is always young, and always produces on us the same effect—"galvanic," if you will, but not "fantastic." It contains no "surprise" properly so called; its effect is much deeper, in a region in which intellectual curiosity has nothing to do.

But what he is trying to say is more curious and just than what he succeeds in saying:

Moreover, let us not deceive ourselves. Every great poet, such as Virgil or Racine, has produced on

his contemporaries, and still produces on us, when we can place ourselves at his point of view, the same *fantastic commotion* caused us successively by Goethe, Hoffmann, and M. Victor Hugo.

Later, he will speak, apropos to "Les Rayons et les Ombres," of this *poetico-magnetic* weapon which Victor Hugo wields so dexterously.¹

But, it will be asked, what is this poetic sentiment? Bravo! Bravo! Here we are:

I do not think there is a single man so deprived of imagination as not to have felt, at least once in his life, *that superexcitation of the intelligence, that momentary vertigo of the heart and thought* which I call *the poetic state*. This phenomenon is one of the least studied of psychological facts, but certainly one of those most worthy of investigation.

Already, in 1829, he had written:

It is dangerous to define a science which exists only in project. But nevertheless, since we are obliged to do so, we will define æsthetic in relation to poetry as the knowledge of all the phenomena experienced by the soul in the poetic state. *To recognise this singular state . . .*

Hear! Hear! as the English say. All, indeed, lies in that.

To show how it differs from the normal state; to identify the condition and circumstances in which the passions

¹ *Causeries et méditations historiques*, par Charles Magnin (Paris, 1923), i, p. 315. The article on the nature of poetic genius will be found in the same volume (pp. 88-158).

and feelings pass into the poetic state; to traverse the whole gamut of impressions of this nature that the human imagination can experience . . . in a word, to study our soul as affected by that infinite variety of pleasures that the poetic view of man, nature or herself brings to birth in her, such are the principal objects included in an æsthetic of poetry.¹

It is impossible to be more intelligent, more "romantic," more anti-classicist.²

We finally perceive that even under our tempered sky man is not only gifted with reason and sensibility, but also with another and completely distinct faculty.

He proposes to call this faculty "imagination"; the term is equivocal, but for the moment that does not matter.

Art and poetry, as we understand them, do not, like eloquence and philosophy, *act directly on the sensibility or the reason*; but should address themselves to the imagination, and only act on the reason and the sensibility *secondarily and reflexively*.

And quite decided, if I may say so, to cut in anticipation all my supposed audacities from under my feet:

It is a singular idea of poetry, he continues, to wish it to be as wise as an article of the civil code, and as

¹ *Causeries et méditations*, p. 64.

² "The eighteenth century . . .," he also says, "had pushed so far the cult of rationalism and the mania of sentimentality that it had left no place for poetry" (*ibid.*, p. 94). Thus to yoke "rationalism" and "sentimentalism" is the performance of no ordinary mind.

lucid as the demonstration of the square of the hypotenuse. *It is time that the true principles were re-established.* The pleasures of the imagination (let us say of the poetic sense) are almost always based on *something obscure or inadmissible to reason*, and I have no doubt that I could prove that it is the nature of poetry to be mad, or at least to appear so.

However strange this assertion may appear, *it is a fact* that a subject is poetical in inverse proportion to its clarity.

We might rather say that all the qualities or defects of the intellectual order—clarity, obscurity, etc.—cannot be attributed to a super-intellectual experience.

Poetry has also no purchase on mathematical truths or on the demonstrative parts of the physical and experimental sciences. . . .

He does not say enough here; poetry has no purchase on any truth as such; its object is the real and not the true.

Man is born for knowledge. . . . He has been given two instruments for its attainment: reason with which to pursue and attain science, and imagination which only captures poetry, which may be called half-science, or, better, pre-science.

Still better, hyper-science.

By a sort of *divinatory instinct*, insufficiently studied by philosophy, the imagination seizes relations too fine and delicate to be otherwise perceived.

There is no "opposition" no "discord between poetry and reason."

It is true that they do not strike their notes in unison; they follow in this the laws of harmony; the interval may be more or less bold, more or less difficult to seize, but it is a true harmonic interval which merely requires a sufficiently delicate sense for its perception. There exists between poetry and reason a final and secret conformity which time reveals.¹

I repeat that all this was written in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, and in 1833.

As far as I know, the debate, thus begun, reached its next stage in France with Baudelaire. His æsthetic was not, however, fully intelligible until after the victory of symbolism. Magnin was a spirit of the advance-guard, and, what is rare with us, a European spirit. With us, moreover, the criticism of poetry, even when approving romantics such as Baudelaire and Verlaine,

¹ He quotes in passing and discusses an affirmation of Jouffroy, not altogether unpleasant to us: "Poetry sings the sentiments of the period on the beautiful and the true (a strange formula!). It expresses the confused thought [?] of the masses in a more animated, but not in a clearer manner, because it *feels this thought more vividly without understanding it any the more. Philosophy understands it. If poetry understood it, it would become philosophy and would disappear.* (If the eye perceived music, it would become the ear and disappear.) This is why Pope and Voltaire are philosophers, and not poets. This is why poetry is commoner and more beautiful in the least enlightened ages [no!], rarer and colder in the ages of knowledge [no! no! Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats]; this is why in these ages it is the privilege of the ignorant." Neither of the ignorant nor of the learned; it is the privilege of poets, of those who have received this gift, this faculty which is completely distinct from reason.

remains exclusively faithful to the tradition of classical humanism. The mystery of poetry does not appeal to critics who are entirely concentrated on tasting the pleasure of poetry. From Laharpe to Sainte-Beuve, and from him to Lemaître, taste develops, no doubt, but reigns alone. Naturally I am speaking only of poetical criticism in the proper sense of the word.¹ Its formula was fixed by Fénelon in his *Lettre à l'Académie*. Such criticism is exquisite, beneficent, indeed indispensable, for we have no other rampart against the barbarians; but it is short-sighted and incomplete, closed to the superior uneasiness awakened by romanticism. It is a sufficient formula for *Lutrin*, even for the *Odes* of Horace, but not for Virgil or Lamartine.

English criticism, on the other hand, found itself spontaneously at the height of the new poetry. Not a very surprising fact, since from the dawn of romanticism the work of criticism was done by the poets themselves—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, Shelley, Keats, and then Matthew Arnold. I will quote

¹ This is true even of those whose taste was not their strongest faculty. Scherer, for instance, so intelligent and, if I may say so, so "European." His study on Wordsworth is curious (*Études*, vii). For him, as for Magnin, poetry is "the imaginative conception of things," but he takes the word imagination in the meaning of the old criticism. Thus, he concludes without hesitation, "The image is the proper language of poetry," which brings us back to Père Rapin. He owes much to Matthew Arnold, but I am not very sure that he understood him. He has a distressing remark on Keats: "With all his faults, Keats is not commonplace!"

a page from Arnold on the "magic power of poetry." It occurs in the essay on Maurice de Guérin:

I will not presume to say that I now know the French language well; but at a time when I knew it even less well than at present—some fifteen years ago—I remember pestering those about me with this sentence, the rhythm of which had lodged itself in my head, and which, with the strangest pronunciation possible, I kept perpetually declaiming: *Les dieux jaloux ont enfoui quelque part la descendance des choses ; mais au bord de quel océan ont-ils roulé la pierre qui les couvre, ô Macarée ! . . .* The grand power of poetry is its interpretative power; by which I mean, not a power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them. When this sense is awakened in us, as to objects without us, we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of those objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them, but to have their secret, and to be in harmony with them; and this feeling calms and satisfies us as no other can. . . . I will not now inquire whether this sense is illusive, whether it can be proved not to be illusive, whether it does absolutely make us possess the real nature of things; all I say is, that poetry can awaken it in us, and that to awaken it is one of the highest powers of poetry. The interpretations of science do not give us this intimate sense of objects as the interpretations of poetry give it; they appeal to a limited faculty, and not to the whole man. It is not Linnæus, or Cavendish, or Cuvier who gives us the true sense of animals, or water, or plants, who

seizes their secret for us, who makes us participate in their life; it is Shakespeare, with his—

daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.

It is Wordsworth, with his—

Voice . . . heard
In springtime from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

It is Keats, with his—

Moving waters at their priest-like task
Of cold ablution round earth's human shores.

It is Chateaubriand, with his “ *Cime indéterminée des forêts*; it is Sénancour, with his mountain birch-tree, *Cette écorce blanche, lisse, et crevassée ; cette tige agreste ; ces branches qui s'inclinent vers la terre ; la mobilité des feuilles, et tout cet abandon, simplicité de la nature, attitude des deserts.*¹

As is evident, the progress from Magnin to Arnold is considerable. Both of them have the merit of isolating the poetic fact and of attaching themselves to it in order to describe it—Magnin from the outside, Arnold from within. Magnin is, above all, struck by the commotion which accompanies poetical experience; Arnold throws light on what that commotion seems to bring with it, a sort of contact with the real. A

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London, 1875), pp. 92-94.

kind of current is produced, a galvanic current, says Magnin; this current, continues Arnold, places us in possession of something which is not a truth, and does not first of all and at once enrich *our intelligence*. The enrichment that it does affect remains still mysterious; it will always so remain. It is for us more and more to reduce the obscurity which envelops it, and this will be the task of another English critic, the premier critic, perhaps, of our day, Mr. A. C. Bradley.

Appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1901—the Oxford Chair of Poetry is one of the glories of England—Mr. Bradley chose for the subject of his inaugural lecture, “Poetry for Poetry’s Sake”—that is, the technically poetical element in a poem in which there are so many other things; in other words, *Pure Poetry*.¹ I still remember, after twenty years, the deep impression these pages made upon me. I did not understand them very well, but I felt that the reason of my incomprehension was my rationalist and anti-mystical prejudices. Since then these pages have not ceased to work in me, and if in my turn, I have been able to advance a step towards the solution of this unique problem, it is to Mr. Bradley, after Newman and the mystics, that I owe it.

For reasons too long to set down here I will leave on one side this first lecture, and devote myself to

¹ For Mr. Bradley, as for myself, *Pure Poetry* is an abstraction. “I do not believe,” he writes, “that the nature of things permits the existence of anything which would be poetry only” (*Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 145).

one which is consecrated to "The Views of Shelley on Poetry." The long passage which I am going to try and translate is not of Cartesian limpidity. The reason is that the writer is attempting to define the indefinable—*i.e.*, poetical experience or knowledge, which, properly speaking, is not knowledge, for though it enlightens and enriches the depths of our soul, it conveys nothing to our understanding.

For Shelley, poetry is no doubt creation, but primarily revelation. Inspiration comes before everything. A foreign influence seizes hold of the poet, who can neither understand nor control it; a divine power penetrates him and obliges him to produce certain images of perfection by which he tries to save from the gulf of nothingness which waits for them, these visits of God to man. This is poetry.¹ Shelley wishes to defend it against those who maintain that poetry is condemned to decline with the progress of civilisation, and that it must yield its place to reason and the pursuit of the useful. No, his message is always in season; it is that message alone that presents to us the ideal forms of the perfection to which we should tend.

But what! If poetry has for its task to make us perfect, must we not conclude that the mission of the poet is to teach, and that consequently poetic know-

¹ Like almost everyone, Shelley calls this poetic faculty "imagination." Keats calls it "sensation." "*O for a life of sensation, rather than of thought!*" Oh! who will grant me to think no more, but always to feel? "To feel" here means "to feel poetically" (Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 234).

ledge is rational knowledge in the strict sense of the words? Not at all, and this brings us to the heart of the problem. "I hold didactic poetry in horror," said Shelley; "it is useless and tedious to put into verse what can be equally well expressed in prose. There is an absurdity of which neither Homer nor any other poet of the first rank would have been capable. But those in whose case the poetic gift, though real, was less intense, such as Euripides, Lucian, Tasso, Spenser, often put before themselves a moral purpose, with the result that the more apparent their purpose becomes, the more their poetry declines." Understand him aright, comments Mr. Bradley; Shelley would be the last to contest that poetry is beneficent, that it should contribute to the moral progress of humanity; what he will not endure is that poetry should pursue this moral end didactically. It is not the business of the poet to give moral *instruction*, or to communicate doctrines, not his to defend by argument his ideas on good and evil; he does not address himself to the discursive reason of his readers. To improve your fellows, says he to the poet, is no doubt your strict duty as a man; but you must do so as a poet, in the manner of poets, which has nothing to do with argument or preaching. Teaching, proving, prose can do it as well or better. But let us allow Mr. Bradley, whose meaning up to the present I have but resumed, speak for himself:

Poetry is largely an interpretation of life; and considering what life is, that must mean a moral interpretation. This, to have poetic value, must satisfy

imagination; but we value it also because it gives us knowledge, a wider comprehension, a new insight into ourselves and the world. Now it may be held—and this view answers to a very general feeling among lovers of poetry now—that the most deep and original moral interpretation is not likely to be that which most shows a moral purpose, or is most governed by reflective beliefs and opinions, and that as a rule we learn most from those who do not try to teach us, and whose opinions may even remain unknown to us; so that there is this weighty objection to the appearance of such purpose and opinions, that it tends to defeat its own intention. And the reason that I wish to suggest is this, that always we get most from the *genius* in a man of genius, and not from the rest of him. Now although poets often have unusual powers of reflective thought, the specific genius of a poet does not lie there, but in imagination. Therefore his deepest and most original interpretation is likely to come by the way of imagination. And the specific way of imagination is not to clothe in imagery consciously held ideas; it is to produce half-consciously a matter from which, when produced, the reader may, if he chooses, extract ideas. Poetry (I must exaggerate to be clear), psychologically considered, is not the *expression* of ideas or of a view of life; it is their discovery or creation, or, rather, both discovery and creation in one. The interpretation contained in *Hamlet* or *King Lear* was not brought ready-made to the old stories. What was brought to them was the huge substance of Shakespeare's imagination, in which all his experience and thought was latent; and this, dwelling and working on the stories with nothing but a dramatic purpose, and kindling into heat and motion, gradually discovered or created in

them a meaning and a mass of truth about life, which was brought to birth by the process of composition, but never preceded it in the shape of ideas, and probably never, even after it, took that shape to the poet's mind.¹

In other words, it is probable that even when his work is complete, the poet has no reflective consciousness of the ideas which it contains in the state of germ or bait, as, for example, the views on the mystery of being suggested to the reader by the tragedy of *Hamlet*.

Such are the interpretations of life of which we speak (such this criticism of life), which we say (with Arnold) are contained in all authentic poetry—an unformulated criticism and yet indefinitely instructive, because it is the very genius of Shakespeare. Place by the side of this confused mass what, indeed, we do not, but would like to know of the conscious, reflective philosophy, properly so called, of Shakespeare; nothing assures us that this baggage would have great value. The opinions, the reasoned convictions of poets have rarely the precious quality of their purely imaginative creations.

The intelligence of some may be magnificent: Goethe, for instance; but usually there is nothing original about their minds. Their "ideas" are not different from those formed every day by excellent people without genius. They have their banal philosophy, useless for poetical purposes. It is quite true that we ask of poetry a "moral interpretation" of

¹ A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 172, 173 (Macmillan and Co., 1926).

life, but it is an interpretation of a very special kind, and which only poetry can give us.

Homer and Shakespeare have no moral doctrine to teach us. Milton has one which he proposes to us with endless arguments; he strains himself to "justify the ways of Providence." Nothing is less poetical than this theological labour; not there is his profound poetry to be found. Goethe himself could not have told us what he intended to express in his first *Faust*. His own poem showed it him, and this is why this poem is such a wonder. He knew too well what he wanted to say in his second *Faust*, and precisely, in consequence of that, it is more or less of a failure as a poetic work. . . . The same thing may be said of Tennyson's partial failure in the *Idylls*. He wished to build up a great poem on certain very explicit views: on the idea of a soul ravaged by the passions. He failed, not because his ideas were not right, but because they were not the creation of his poetic genius. If the poetry of Shelley is beneficent, if it makes us better, this is not due to the doctrines which it teaches; it is due to an intuition indistinguishable from the deeper soul of Shelley, the intuition of the unique value of love.

Does this laborious construction satisfy you? I hope not. I would rather that it should irritate you, that it should leave you the impression of a blundering step in the night. Believe me, it is a bad blunder. Once more, it is not a question of making you understand in what poetic activity consists, but, on the contrary, to lead you to realise how impossible it is that we should ever understand it, to lead you further

to deduce—oh ! quite rationally—from that very impossibility some illumination on poetic experience. I will now become a professor, and blunder in my turn.

Those who have understood me up to the present without difficulty, and, so to speak, instantaneously, will have passed gaily alongside of Mr. Bradley's thought. With Shelley—and almost everyone—Mr. Bradley begins by repeating that the mission of the poet, although moralising, is not that of the preacher. What ! is this all there is to say ? We have already admitted this truism: the *Iliad* is not, and cannot be, a sermon. Very good, but observe that such a critic as Mr. Bradley would not waste his time reminding us of truisms if he had not the intention of leading us by that road to some much more subtle and disputable truth; his design is to show us, not that the *Iliad* is not, but that it *cannot* be a sermon; or, in other terms, that it is absolutely impossible for the poet, as such, to give instructions in morals, and that this particular impossibility supposes another more radical and more extensive in its reach—namely, that the poet, as such, not only should not, but cannot teach anything whatsoever, any more than the ear as such can sniff a perfume. The bridges are cut between poetry and the activity of teaching as they are between the ear and fragrant emanations. Didactic poetry is a monster, still less, an absurdity, a square circle.

Here, again, the evidence is easy, but it is also easy to lose the thread of the reasoning. What exactly does "didacticism" mean, one thinks ? Surely that

the poet is not a professor any more than, as we said just now, a preacher; that he should not set in order, present, develop his ideas according to the ordinary rules of logic, going from the known to the unknown, multiplying his definitions, and leading his arguments to the attack; briefly, that the *Iliad* and the *Discours de la Méthode* are two quite different things. Here, again, is a truism which no one will think of disputing, and which does not make the discussion on the essence of poetry advance by a line. I remember M. Souday during the controversy on pure poetry: while I brandished as a talisman the anathema hurled by Edgar Poe and Baudelaire at didacticism, he triumphantly replied; the restraints of the didactic machinery interfere with the normal development of the poet. On this point we are all agreed. How does that prove the non-rationality of poetic activity?

We are not discussing here the machinery of didacticism, but didacticism, which is nothing but the normal exercise of intelligence and the spoken word. To practise, so to say, didacticism, there is no need to climb into a pulpit, to stir the sugar in your glass of water, and to say: "I am going to show you firstly that . . . secondly that . . .," etc. That is the doctoral didacticism, yellow-robed didacticism, and it goes without saying that the poet must avoid it like fire. But to express an idea, whatever it may be, in the quietest way possible, and without wishing to teach anyone; to say simply: "I am thirsty; the first swallow

has just arrived; life is a battle . . .”—all this is pure didacticism. For good or for evil, willingly or not, we only speak in order to say something, and, consequently, to make someone know—that is to say, we *teach* something. Whoever opens his mouth or takes up his pen to communicate an idea is *teaching*. To say that poetry cannot be didactic is to say that the poet as such is not, and cannot be, a man who endeavours to communicate his ideas.

Then you forbid him to think? No, no more than I forbid the ear to perceive perfumes. It is an impotence of the metaphysical order that I note. The whole development of Mr. Bradley's argument has no other purpose but to help us to realise this impotence, which, moreover, has nothing humiliating about it. From the fact that the poet is gifted with a particular sense in which precisely his poetship consists, and which thereby distinguishes him from other men, it does not follow that we deny him the faculties common to all men, least of all, reason. As a reasonable man he thinks, he has ideas, and as a social man he expresses these ideas, having recourse for that purpose to the language of us all—in short, to prose. As a poet, he happens to be favoured with certain experiences, which are certainly good for him, and enrich him, but which do not immediately teach him anything new, which do not add in any way to his stock of rational knowledge, to his ideas. But, it will be said, since he is at one and the same time both a reasonable man and a poet, why do you not wish him to try to express

in poetical fashion the ideas which come to him as a reasonable man? This question, unfortunately, has no sort of meaning. You might as well ask auditory sensations to transform themselves into olfactory sensations, you might as well ask the arm to sing. Gesture may accompany the voice—when the throat and the arms belong to the same person—but the nature of things forbids a gesture to vocalise.

Is he then, *qua* poet, condemned to silence? Yes and no. His poetical experience not being a rational activity, not placing him in relation with truth by the intermediary of ideas, that experience remains in itself ineffable. The most beautiful words in the world cannot translate it, since words only translate ideas. From another point of view, it is a certain fact that the poet cannot hoard that experience for himself. The more magnificent it is, and therefore the more ineffable, the more he feels the need of communicating it. So he speaks, which is as much as to say that he expresses ideas, for speaking is nothing else. He takes the only imaginable means of entering into communication with us. But instead of this transmission of ideas, this didacticism being—as in ordinary language—the final and single purpose of the speaker, here it is only a means. By the intermediary of the ideas which he expresses, or rather by the intermediary of the very expressions he uses, the poet designs, not to teach us anything whatever, although he naturally cannot express himself without teaching something, but to communicate to us a certain shock,

to train us to be worthy of a certain experience, to raise us to a certain condition.¹ It is just in that that the miracle of poetry consists, or, as we say, its magic. Ordinary language has but one function to fulfil: to bring to birth in the mind of the listener the intellectual representations corresponding to the words it uses. Poetical words have a double function, a double virtue. The poet, being obliged to use them, takes them as they are, expecting from them the service which a word can render: the evocation of such or such an idea. But while he employs them in this way, precisely because he is a poet, and in the special conditions of a poet, he imprints on these very words a new virtue, which does not properly belong to them, which no convention could assign to them. A virtue which we call magical, whether to distinguish it from the natural virtue of words, or to symbolise the strange power the poet confers upon them, that power, as it were, of contagious shining which produces the effect that by merely hearing them we suddenly find ourselves not only enriched by the ideas they convey, but moved in the depths of our being.

Animus and *Anima* : reason and poetry. Words

¹ "The mystic, as a rule, cannot wholly do without symbol and image, inadequate to his vision though they must always be; for his experience must be expressed if it is to be communicated, and its actuality is inexpressible except in some sidelong way, some hint or parallel which will stimulate the dormant intuition of the reader, and convey, as all poetic language does, something beyond its surface sense" (Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, London, 1912, p. 94).

considered in their natural being—*i.e.*, as signs of ideas—belong to the sole master of ideas, *Animus*. He has made them in his own image, rationalising them through and through. When *Anima* wants to talk, she can only borrow the dictionary of *Animus*. But, without robbing them of what makes their substance—the property, that is, of representing ideas—she possesses the secret of associating them just as they are with her own activity, transmitting to them her own vibrations, breathing into them her own life. A transmutation impossible to define, but a fact of experience. *Animus* hears her song and laughs in his coarse way. “Ah!” says he, “she has stolen all my words, and has not added the shadow of a new meaning to the ideas which they represent. Why, then, all this trouble?” That is, as the reader will remember, precisely the very just reasoning of the rationalist æsthetic; reason only being acceptable to didacticism, all poetry is closed to it. Yes or no, do you teach reason anything new? If yes, you are only doing what prose can do as well, and better. So be silent. . . .

Et pourtant elle est immortelle
Et ceux qui se sont passés d'elle
Ici-bas ont tout ignoré. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

TOWARDS A MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF POETRY

WHAT is the use of repeating at every other line that I am no enemy to reason? That is well for those who have but a reduced confidence in it, and therefore shout at the top of their voices that they adore it, that they will permit no one to insult it, as some sing at nightfall to persuade themselves that they are not afraid of robbers or ghosts. The sincerest homage that can be paid to reason is rigorously to apply its methods. We do not conceal that we have the firm intention of disputing its monopoly, but it is reason itself which we invite to this scrutiny, this verification of frontiers.

They are "bewildering," said of us during the controversy on pure poetry a good man in a state of great excitement, whose name was, I think, Fontainas or Ernest Prevost. Fortunately, he added, there is not one of them—poets, he means—who has intervened in the *mêlée*. Why should they have, for goodness' sake? A bird would find a debate on the mechanism of flight at a full meeting of the Académie des Sciences no less bewildering. To each of us his trade: ours is to analyse poetic experience as realised in the masterpieces of true poets;

theirs is to pursue this ineffable experience, clinging to the mane of their antique Pegasus, intoxicating themselves at their ancient fountain. Neither I, just Heaven ! nor anyone else of those who have taken a serious part in this debate have ever thought of mingling, during the actual course of that debate, in those dishevelled cavalcades or those holy orgies. More than one poet has joined our side, but always after leaving lute and laurel-wreath in the cloakroom, and having donned the grave robe and assumed the quiet manner of philosopher or savant.

What, they will say, do you not constantly call on the witness of poets ?¹ Yes, but of those who will accept the rules of the game, which on this occasion substitute reasoning for singing. Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, plays only a philosopher's part. The same is true of Wordsworth, Keats, Poe, and Baudelaire when they discuss the essence of poetry, which is a purely rational problem, like the question of any other essence. Surely you would invite to a debate on the mechanism of flight a miraculous

¹ "Witness" here is equivocal. It may mean all the confidences that poets are willing to make on their poetic activity, as they remember it. So Goethe, telling us that when he sat down to write *Faust* he had no thesis to prove. Such statements, wherever they come from, are interesting to science. But if by "witness" you mean the purely philosophical opinions of this or that poet on the nature of poetry, these opinions will be worth just as much as the speculative intelligence of that poet. Often very little. I prefer to know what M. Bergson thinks of poetry *in se* to what Villon thinks of it.

bird who was also a Doctor of Science? Neither Shelley nor Poe would have found us bewildering, particularly as we did nothing but develop their own ideas. However high we place them, the poets belong to us. If poetry is a reality, one of the forces of nature, it cannot escape the critical examination of reason.¹

The movements of reason are slow. It walks, and does not jump. How far have we got, after all these pages? Not very far. But we have taken one decisive step. We have disengaged and isolated poetical experience, and that, not by describing its intrinsic nature, but simply by distinguishing it from the properly intellectual activities which accompany it, which are in some sort grafted on it, and which, better known, more prominent, above all more communicable, threaten to hide it from the eyes of many. We know much less what it is not than what it is.

Is it, then, a novelty to say that poetic activity is distinguished from rational? Not at all, fortunately. The stream of tradition has always admitted this capital difference. The novelty and the whole of

¹ Cf. a chapter heading of Maurice Blondel. "Of a method of procedure which, bringing the so-called mystical (or poetical) facts to the level of reason, would be the negation of the philosophical spirit, as well as of the proper object of mystical science (or poetics)" (*Cahiers de la Nouvelle Journée, Qu'est ce que la Mystique*, Paris, 1925, pp. 7 seq.); and he quotes Aristotle's witticism on metaphysics: "If we ought to philosophise, well then, let us do so. If not, we must still philosophise in order to know the grounds of denial."

romanticism, I repeat, consists in this, lies in the exaltation of this experience, in the holding it to be sovereignly noble and beneficent, whereas Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Lamotte, Buffier despised it because it is not rational. Up till now, however, we have hardly got further than an act of faith in the excellence of the poetic gift. We have not attempted a demonstration of its nature, and, indeed, we were not in a position to do so. Before discussing the quality of any phenomenon, it is first necessary to be convinced of its reality. Remember the tooth of gold of which Fontenelle speaks. Gold or brass, we shall see later. We must begin by asking whether or no the tooth ever existed. What I have attempted up to the present is to show that poetic experience is no myth; let us now try to arrive at a less negative idea, and thus justify our romantic act of faith.

An eminent critic, to whom we also owe two master-pieces of political philosophy, and who was, moreover, strange to say, a great financier, Walter Bagehot, wrote sixty years ago:

Even today (1864) the idea of taking poetry seriously, as a grave matter, to see therein an incomparable mistress of elevation and wisdom, would appear absurd to almost everyone. To the great public, poetry is but a drawing-room game for wasted hours, a sort of serial novel in rhyme. I do not forget that thirty years ago Mr. Carlyle fiercely contradicted the general opinion on this point. But that is all he did. He protested against triumphant paganism; he did not build upon its ruins the religion of poetry.

All around us a faith in poetry is seeking to form itself, but without success up to the present. Some day the word we are waiting for will be said, and everything will grow clear, as by enchantment. The scraps of truth which attract us will come together, the confused presentiments which allure us will suddenly crystallise and reunite themselves in a true and brilliant theory. But we are not there yet.¹

This word, this flag, this ferment, this keystone, this crystallising principle, we have it at length, for the impersonal and irresistible movement of contemporary thought has caused it to flash forth on several sides at once—in France and in England, and, no doubt, elsewhere as well. Whether it has, or has not, conquered all votes is of small importance. When we say today that poetic experience is an experience of the mystical order, we no doubt irritate the last fanatics of rationalism, but it is only the rearguard who are surprised. It was by the explosion, if I may use the term, of this word that I concluded my little academic discourse on pure poetry, and, twelve years before, Père de Grandmaison had placed poetic experience among “those ‘profane’ states of nature in which one can already decipher the great lines and discern the image and rough sketch of the mystical states of the soul.”² It was a theologian who spoke thus, and one may be sure that he had scrupulously weighed and carefully chosen his terms.

¹ *Literary Studies* (Everyman's Library), vol. ii, p. 307.

² *Etudes*, May 5, 1913.

CHAPTER IX

POETRY AND MYSTICISM

IT is but a word. We select it because it helps us to realise, to criticise with precision, the confused idea we have always had of poetry. "Enthusiasm," "*Dic mihi musa*," "inspiration," "secret influence of heaven," such phraseology, even when diluted, has no meaning unless a mystical character is attached to poetry. "Dieu est en nous," sang Ronsard,

Et par nous fait miracle,
Si que les vers d'un poète écrivant,
Ce sont des Dieux les secrets et oracles,
Que par sa bouche ils poussent en avant.

Ronsard would have preferred "prophetic" to "mystical":

Celui qui ne nous honore
Comme prophètes des dieux,
Plein d'un orgueil odieux,
Les dieux il méprise encore. . . .

Humbler, less miraculous, "mystical" does better. It has, above all, the advantage of suggesting the definitely, exclusively psychological orientation we wish to give to the debate on poetry.

Need I add that this word is not a sortilege? I shall have to explain later the comparison between the true

contemplative and the poet, but what we can affirm at once is that this comparison is obvious and inevitable. "There are certainly," writes an English theologian, Fr. Sharpe, "striking resemblances between the flashes of inspiration which reveal and define genius, and the mysterious intuition of the Divine Presence granted to the mystics."¹ We have already heard the view of Père de Grandmaison; like him and before him, Père Maréchal, to whom we owe some excellent studies on mysticism, makes use of the same assimilation several times. For myself I only distinguish myself from both of them on one point, and I am sure they would not dream of contesting my right to do so. I simply reverse the perspective. While they, as I understand them, wish to throw the light of poetic experience on to mystical experience, I ask the latter to reveal to me the true nature of the former. It is not Shelley's experience that helps me to know better the experience of John of the Cross, but conversely it is the experience of the saint which makes a little less obscure the mystery of the experience of the poet. Whence come the resemblances between these two states, in other ways so different, which interest us so much? Another theologian shall tell us. "The supernatural character of our interior life," writes Père de Guibert, "does not necessarily *modify the psychological design of that life* ; where it does modify it it does not do so by violently introducing com-

¹ A. B. Sharpe, *Mysticism, its True Nature and Value* (London, 1910).

pletely foreign elements, but by helping, completing, transforming, elevating the constitution of our natural psychic activity.”¹ It is, therefore, in the psychological design of his own experience that the poet can be compared to the mystic. Apart from that, an abyss of differences. Now it so happens that the mystics have described this psychological design, with all its springs and complicated mechanism, in a detail and with a penetration which may be sought in vain in the confidences of the poets. These do not amount to much; the richest—those of Wordsworth, for instance, in his *Prelude*, or of Edgar Poe—are nothing if compared, I do not say to the autobiographical analyses of St John of the Cross or St Teresa, but to those of the average mystic. The simplest, the most faltering, astound us, and the day is not far distant when it will be no longer understood how professional psychologists can have neglected such treasures for so many centuries. It must be remembered that mystics, different in this from poets, only resign themselves—the word is not too strong—to their formidable privilege after an heroic resistance. They are always afraid of being the plaything of some illusion. Hence these pitiless examinations which they inflict on themselves; hence these many-sided questions which they put to their directors; hence the incomparable literature which I have mentioned; hence, finally, our axiom: that it is from the mystic that we can learn to understand the poet.

¹ *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, January, 1920 p. 18.

Whatever the case may be, and before sketching out the parallel which interests us between the poet and the mystic, it may perhaps not be useless to calm once more the scruples of those to whom the very idea of this assimilation seems scandalous. I quote here, therefore, the opinion of a Christian savant of universally recognised competence, which is in entire agreement with the few lines of Père de Guibert which have just been read.

The mystic, writes Père Maréchal, in the perfectly concrete reality of his special states, does not lose his temperament, nor his physical weaknesses, nor his nerves, nor his intellectual or moral culture, nor his receptivity in regard to the influences which surround him—in a word, neither the physiology nor the psychology that are natural to him . . . the mystical states, even in their higher degrees, so strongly marked with the stamp of the individuals who experience them, throw out deep roots into the region of the general psycho-physiological activities, continue these latter, prolong them in a fashion, and extend their scope, far from substituting for them wholly “new” and heterogeneous faculties hard to be understood.

On this principle, which is almost a truism, everyone can agree . . .; between the fundamental modes of human psychological activity and the various mystical realisations—even up to, and including, by hypothesis, supernatural mysticism—there exist *analogies of form and communities of mechanism*.¹

¹ Joseph Maréchal, professor at the philosophical and theological college of the Society of Jesus at Louvain, *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques* (Paris, 1924), English

We shall briefly show "analogies of form and communities of mechanism," which permit us to designate by the same name the experiences of poet and mystic, after which we shall come to the differences between them.

It is, indeed, because in a more or less confused manner we feel the mystics to be men like ourselves that we cannot resign ourselves to know nothing of them. Our first reaction to them might be to say: "What do these exceptional beings matter to us?"

translation (Burns Oates and Washbourne, London, 1927), p. 150. Suarez had already said: *Gratia licet elevet naturam ad operationes supernaturales tamen secundum legem ordinarium servat modum operandi consentaneum naturae, quoad fieri potest* (*De Oratione*, t. ii). "Poetry is not prayer; poetry does not of its own nature attain to prayer," wrote again the other day Dom Auburg. This is so evident that I never imagined anyone could think I doubted it. "Of its own nature"—that is to say, that as long as poetry remains itself, it does not attain to prayer. Appropriating—and correcting—a famous phrase of Pater, I merely said that poetry tends of its nature to join prayer, not music. If its essence be to tend to join prayer, it stands to reason, in sound metaphysic, that if it should become prayer, it would no longer be poetry. What is meant by "tending to join prayer"? Quite simply that the psychological mechanism used by grace to raise us to prayer is the same as that put in movement in poetic experience. Dom Auburg continues admirably: "Poetry is a sign; it indicates a higher faculty in us, capable of receiving God, though incapable of apprehending him" (*La Vie Spirituelle*, 1926, p. 556). Why is poetry incapable of apprehending God as prayer apprehends him? Because not only contemplation, but the humblest prayer worthy of the name is a supernatural gift of God.

Let us leave them to be happy alone with their incommunicable privileges, the very description of which renders the night in which we live blacker and more stifling ! But no. However far above us their experience may seem, far from disconcerting us as an enigma or repelling us as a chimera, it allures us as a promise. Instead of placing mystics outside humanity, we feel more inclined to open the mystical career to all humanity. The fallen god who remembers heaven is not surprised that here below the élite of his brethren should penetrate the lost paradise. If our intelligence does not attain directly and immediately the Being of beings, it aims at him and affirms him as soon as it begins to act. "The human intelligence," says Père Maréchal after St Thomas, "is not merely a mirror passively reflecting the objects which pass within its field, but an activity directed in its deepest manifestations towards a well-defined term, the only term which can completely absorb it—Absolute Being, Absolute Truth and Goodness."¹ It aspires to God before it knows him. It has already seized him in a certain sense before naming him.² Briefly, it can only cease to take an interest in the mystics if it deny itself, and we are lucky to find between us and the mystics some intermediaries easier to deal with—the poets.

¹ Maréchal, *op. cit.*, Eng. trans., p. 100.

² Père Picard, *La saisie immédiate de Dieu* (Paris, Ed. Spes).

CHAPTER X

INSPIRATION AND PROFANE MYSTICAL STATES

O world invisible, we view thee;
O world intangible, we touch thee;
O world unknowable, we know thee;
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

WE call certain manifestations and activities of our interior life mystical or belonging to mysticism—moral, intellectual, artistic activities—which reason turn by turn ridicules, condemns, or sanctions, while failing to “comprehend” them in the literal sense of the word. It is the usage of the language. This definition is but negative, and must of course be completed. Such, then, are the fear of ghosts; all occultisms; all enthusiasms; all fanaticisms, whether of the Moslem or of M. Homais; philosophies of politics or history; the pluckings at the heart in a church; or at the sight of the starry heavens; all acts of self-devotion; all inspirations; all loves. In all these “mysticisms,” we shall find, often more or less veiled, distorted, or contaminated, the elements which we propose to bring to light.

“Sometimes,” Père de Grandmasion tells us, “during the contemplation of a work of art, or while

listening to a melody, the effort to understand relaxes, and the soul simply delights itself in the beauty which it divines . . . or merely a memory, a word, a line of Dante or Racine shooting up from the obscure depth of our soul, seizes hold of us, 'recollects' and penetrates us. After this experience we know no more than we did, but we have the impression of understanding a little something that before we hardly knew, of tasting a fruit at the rind of which we have scarcely nibbled." Such an experience is, among many others, an instance of those "profane states of nature in which we can decipher the great lines, and discern the image and rough sketch of the mystical states of the soul," properly so called.¹ Just as one frequently applies to the "image" and the "rough sketch" natural epithets which apply more directly and fully to the model and the masterpiece, so one naturally applies the word "mystical" to phenomena which have, or seem to have, nothing specifically religious about them.

¹ Grandmaison, *op. cit.*, p. 314. I repeat that in commencing his study of the *Elan mystique* by the study of natural mysticism, Père de Grandmaison is, I think, deliberately making use of a sort of pedagogical ruse. If poetry is more familiar to us than mystical experience, it is more mysterious. Watch closely, and you will see that the Reverend Father is here throwing light on poetry from mystical experience, rather than *vice versa*. Note, for example, the expressions he borrows from the vocabulary of "quietude"; the active use, for instance, of "recollect." In other words, he is not going, as one might be tempted to think, from the known to the unknown.

Let us analyse more minutely a "poetic experience," and we shall understand better the positive reasons which permit the theologian to recognise in such an experience the "image" or "rough sketch" of mystical experience. In order to do so, let us recall those impressions, only too familiar, which most writers have before a blank sheet of manuscript paper; let us suppose that the happy hour has just struck at which one feels that inspiration at length has come. That is the moment which makes us "mystics."

What has happened in us? A "simplification," reply the savants, and an enriching simplification at that.

But, it will be asked, what need had we to be simplified by inspiration? During those accursed hours and days when we were awaiting the spark, was not our mind, contrariwise, too dull, too languishing, too bare—in a word, too simple? A grave illusion. No, ideas were not lacking; it was rather their diverse abundance from which we were suffering, as Joubert says, the "torments of a fecundity that cannot be delivered." Our very distress shows this; were we really impoverished, we should be unaware of our poverty. That expansively smiling gentleman passing in the street does not know that he is thinking of nothing. Far from languishing, we were, on the contrary, in the throes of a high fever of meditation and research. Never was our curiosity more awake than when we were complaining of our torpor. Ideas

are rushing in; one cannot express them; one seeks, others turn up and smother the earlier arrivals, and make our head go round. In short, an intense, fatiguing activity, but without result. Then the spark shoots out, and there is a great peace. These noisy, tumultuous ideas which just now were worrying us have regained their lairs. One only remains, and that stays half-hidden. *Is it an idea?* So distant, so discreet is it, that one might think it vague. Yet there it is, full of promises; but as one has no fear of its escape, one is in no hurry to seize it. This same law applies to feelings and images.¹

Such is the beginning and the end of those profane mystical states. One would detect, I think, many a memory of these states in the confidences of writers. But most writers are in such a hurry to exploit their vein of luck, to fill the blank page, that they do not pay attention to them. To catch a glimpse of the delights of this "simple view," so eminently active, but so peaceful that it seems like repose, we must consult the real mystics. Wiser than we are, they know the price of "that simple prayer in which the mind has no other object before it than a confused and general view of God, the heart has no other feeling than a sweet and peaceful tasting of God, which nourishes it without effort, as milk feeds children."²

¹ The distress just described is often caused by a first but almost imperceptible inspiration; by a first, but evanescent, contact with the real.

² Grou, *Intérieur de Jésus et de Marie*, 1909, p. 215.

Here another distinction must be made on which, as will later on be seen better, everything depends. It is quite true, in a sense, that inspiration leaves us as rich or as poor as it finds us. Let us boldly say that it teaches us nothing, but merely gives us back our old consciousness so transformed that it astonishes and dazzles us. It was explained to us just now that "we know nothing more, but we have the impression that we comprehend a little of what we scarcely know anything of up till then." "Comprehend" is not the right word, but rather "feel," or "touch," or, still better, "possess." The object with which inspiration presents us is no longer an idea—clear, inanimate, and hollow—but the reality itself which that idea was at one and the same moment showing to us and hiding from us. An example will explain better what I want to say, and also show the identity of character of all generous as well as of poetic inspiration. Let us take one of the commonest manifestations of natural mysticism, patriotism. I know, and if necessary I could prove by cold and solid arguments, that we should love our country; nor am I ignorant of the symbolism of the flag. A regiment passes under my window. An upheaval is at once produced in me. My ideas about my country and my flag wake up, flare in a sort of flame of animation, take me and possess me entirely. I am ready to follow the troops wherever they lead me. A brusque transformation, with which my reason has certainly had nothing to do. Have I devoted the slightest reflection to the subject, have I

discovered any new arguments more efficacious than the old ones? No, nothing is less reasoned, more irresistible, more sudden than my attitude. Moreover, if I happened to be temperamentally refractory to such impressions, no amount of argument would cause me to feel them. I should conclude, no doubt, that it was a good thing to be moved, but I should not be moved. What has happened? What was recently a dead piece of knowledge has become an ardent conviction. Something or other has been produced, as Hume said, which "consists not in the peculiar nature or the order of the ideas, but in the mode of their conception, and in the impression they make on the mind."¹

I am no longer the same man; the idea I have of my country is no longer the one I had before receiving the inspiration; or, rather, it is no longer an idea, it is a living being which speaks to me and calls me. A foreign presence besieges me, enfolds me, penetrates me—in a word, possesses me.

This phenomenon has a scientific name, which Newman has made almost popular. It is a *realisation*. I should quote here all that is said in the *Grammar of Assent* on the difference between notional and real assent. A valuable piece of psychology, but incomplete, as it seems to me, until related to mysticism.

It follows from this that inspiration is no premium on laziness, and that it only really enriches the rich.

¹ Quoted by Maréchal, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

That long distress of the good labourer, wrestling through the night with the still invisible angel, will not have been wasted. And in the same way those dry and merely mortifying virtues that have been courageously practised before the apparition of the heroic signal. Since this "rough sketch" of mystical knowledge enables us to realise what we have already acquired—in the order of thought or of action—the more radiant the "sketch," the richer shall we find ourselves in both these orders. At this point, as I must speak a tongue which is strange to me, I leave the word to Père Maréchal, a professional psychologist. "Let us suppose," he says, "two visitors standing before 'The Praying Youth' (*Der Betende Knabe*), that wonderful Greek bronze in the museum of antique sculpture at Berlin. One is a simple, uncultured amateur, the other an artist and an archæologist. Both are smitten (here is the spark) with the beauty of the work, and are 'contemplating' (note the mystical term) in that semi-numbness of mind which the beautiful induces. (This semi-numbness is the quasi-ecstatic simplification of which we spoke above.) Perhaps, if we could obtain a snapshot of the sensations, feelings, representations, and formal judgements present at the moment in the clear consciousness of the two admirers, the negatives would seem very similar, and also both very incomplete. Yet what a difference in the inner and lived reality! Under the superficial community of visual perception and æsthetic emotion the ignorant amateur brings

only a certain natural good taste, poor, moreover, in experience; the artist-archæologist may bring, in addition, the confused result, subconscious but very rich, of a treasure of accumulated impressions and incipient representations; it is an awakening of potentialities which pass into act only just enough to colour the artist's contemplation by recalling him to the dull and moderate feeling of his inward power of evocation. The same object, apprehended by both parties with a dumb and simple admiration, is diversified by the depth and the richness of the echoes whose awakening it prepares. The two contemplations, then, differ immensely in their potential symbolism and their latent dynamism."¹

Thus inspiration transforms us for a few instants, but gives us neither genius nor virtue. It merely, which is already a great deal, seems to set free and invite to action our natural or acquired intellectual and moral powers. But these activities, literary invention or heroic decision, must not be confused

¹ Maréchal, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174. In both cases the spark has flashed; the simple amateur has also had his "inspiration," but of a richness in proportion to his own modest equipment. In one of these cases the enrichment is imperceptible but real, and this is how we should understand that inspiration only enriches the rich. It is evident that this whole argument applies equally to mystical states of the will. While it raises me to visions and even sentiments of heroism, the sight of the flag will not make a hero of me if I lack courage.

with the inspiration which has, so to speak, hatched them. The inspiration is in the original movement, and not in the course of action which follows it; in the seed, and not in the flower; in that delicious numbness of which we have just heard, and not in the labour which is going to follow, a labour which this interior pacification, this "recollection" has made easier and more intense. Let us not be deceived by those violent, breathless, rather wild images which the very word inspiration suggests to our mind, such as "*non compta . . . comae ; pectus anhelum*"; "learned and holy intoxication"; "enthusiasm, that conquering eagle."

Whether it be prodrome or the ordinary consequence of a mystical state, this *furor* in itself is in no sense mystical. It is caused by the flux of feelings and thoughts that often precede inspiration and almost always follow it. One can understand, moreover, that the poet retains only that part of his experience which has presented itself with the most striking effect on his senses. Analysis is not his business, but if psychologists press him, he will admit that at the climax of his experience his faculties were mysteriously pacified. Neither thunder nor tempest, but a gentle breeze; not much feeling, but that little very sweet; few and very confused ideas; a vague presentiment of the masterpiece to come, but no clear view of it.

When, restored to the free-and-easy use of his powers, he begins to write, he may perhaps seem to us,

and even to himself, to be inspired, but in reality he is inspired no longer, or, if so, in another way. He writes with docility to the dictation of his Muse, but the Muse has no mission to dictate anything at all; and in any case, she has disappeared. Whether profane or supernatural, mystical life differs essentially from our intellectual, or literary, or even moral life. Active, no doubt, and prodigiously active, it seems to us a state of repose. It is never agitated, it never boils up.

Virgil himself and the Sibyl of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* justify us on this point. The poet, indeed, insists a good deal on the frenzied preludes of inspiration; but at length the pacifying "simplification" appears—"Cessit furor et rabida ora quierunt"—and grows complete during the caressing prayer of Aeneas, which acts like a "charm." Then comes the inspiration proper, which is not vouchsafed to us, but of which we can estimate the character from the wise, precise, and almost maternal discourse of the Sibyl. Think of the tenderness of the "Heu! nescis" in reference to the death of Palinurus. Would a raving pythoness have pronounced these two words with such sorrowful and human significance? The magnificent "Saul" of Browning gives us another example of this "simplifying" progression. I have found in the works of an amiable literary critic of the Second Empire a few lines, a little uncertain in detail, but which, in their ensemble, illustrate very well what I have said:

At the very instant when the already projected work is definitely conceived in germ like every other living being, inspiration takes hold of it, inflames it, transfigures it, and makes it shine before the poet's eyes with a bright, mysterious light. He sees in a twinkling of an eye his work, not yet made, but somehow exciting, move and live. . . . Epic or tragedy, it appears to him with its action and personages [this does not seem exactly observed]. In these rare but sublime moments time and space disappear; the work thus created has no limits, or, if it has, the poet does not see them. His thought embraces and penetrates him at so great a depth, that for a moment he is set free from the conditions of the human lot. . . . This is the first [and for the writer of this book the last] note of inspiration. It does not last long, but nothing can take its place when it is over. It gives to a work of poetry that primitive swing, that unlimited movement which is necessary to it; for it must have begun by being too vast in the soul of the poet, in order, afterwards, to be great enough in the eyes of other men.¹

It should be understood, of course, that in reality all these lives, always knit together crosswise, support each other. The Muse—let us keep this useful personification—the Muse, after having brought the *Iliad* to birth, does not ascend into the clouds to redescend only when the poet begins the *Odyssey*. Invisible and silent while the faculties stimulated by her are running their course, she soon reappears;

¹ Edmond Arnould, *Essais de théorie et d'histoire littéraire* (Paris, 1858), pp. 20-21.

whether she reveals to us the beautiful or reveals to us the good, her visits are brief and capricious, but frequent, and that even to the mediocre, whom, indeed, ordinarily speaking, it is not inspiration which fails, but talent or virtue.

CHAPTER XI

THE POETIC MYSTERY

THIS experience, then, contains three phases: first of all, a dull and painful gestation of mind or heart—often, if not always, of both mind and heart—with tumultuous, useless attempts at invention or decision; then comes the spark, the inspiration; and then a joyful fertility of the mind or a gay decision of the heart. The first and the last of these three phases are familiar to us. They contain nothing but the more or less intense exercise of our ordinary faculties—intelligence, imagination, sensibility, and will. I do not say that this is all as clear as daylight, but it is at least the object of an exact science which has its methods and its doctors—psychology, to wit. But the spark, the inspiration, to what science do they belong? What means have we of defining them? What doctrines have explained them to us? The reply is easy. We are here in front of a mystery, or rather of a triple mystery.

§ 1. This inspiration teaches us nothing. Far from stimulating our faculties of knowledge, it pacifies and simplifies them, feeding them with a vague, general, and badly defined object. And yet this inspiration is light-producing, since, how we know not,

the greatest works of human genius are lit up by its cloudy rays. By itself this inspiration does not propose to our will new motives for action, gives it no new force. Far, indeed, from stimulating it to action, it pacifies and simplifies it, rocking it to delicious slumbers. And yet it is a producer of energy, since from apparently restful inertia are derived, we know not how, our most heroic actions.

What is the logical conclusion from this, if not that this mystical life is super-eminently active, that it must move and cause to gush forth in the depths of our being the primary source of all our acts? But this source, more luminous than the lights of our intelligence, freer and more ardent than the decisions of our surface will—the mystics call it the centre of the soul—can be reached by no manner of reflection. All that, then, is mystery; to each one of us it is his own mystery, the secret which we can reveal to no one for the simple reason that we are ignorant of it ourselves.

§ 2. A mystery also, that strange, happy, and moving impression that we then have of penetrating beyond the surface given to our senses, to the substance, the reality of beings. As it transforms ourselves, so also inspiration seems to transform the objects which occupy our attention—a work of art, for instance, or a landscape. Neither colours nor outlines have changed. Our senses perceive—or rather could perceive, for at the moment of inspiration their activity is but slight—exactly the same images as before

but something or other solid, massive, has slipped, so to speak, underneath these images: a life has come to fill this empty frame.

Objets inanimés, avez-vous donc une âme
Qui s'attache à notre âme . . . ?

We feel this soul present attaching us to itself. It is the same thing with abstractions like country, justice, goodness. Not that these are represented under an allegorical form. Such work as that will be done later, when, inspiration having ceased, our faculties will endeavour to fix in some such way its memory. But, for the moment, what need have we of such meaningless *simulacra*? The real, invisible but palpable, invades us, "recollects" us, and enchants us. The rest is nothing, and we willingly leave our faculties to dance in attendance. A new mystery, you will say; yes, but nevertheless it throws light on the primary mystery. Every real presence—I mean by these words the presence of intimate being, and not of its appearances—seems necessarily obscure, confused, and vague, not only to the senses and the imagination, but even to the intelligence.

§ 3. Now a third mystery, at once more impenetrable and at the same time more luminous than the other two. We have a very lively impression that this experience in no way depends upon our own industry; that this sudden gush from the deepest source of our soul, this sudden contact with a real presence; that all this is given us by someone who,

in giving us this, gives us himself.¹ We may call the witness on this point, not of a few *illuminati*, but of Plato, of all the poets, of all heroes, and, in fact, of all humanity. Inspiration is unanimously regarded as a visit; often, indeed, the visitor is given his name. Mystery of mysteries, the inspiration which we have just observed to be so active is also, and seems to be still more "passive." If we wished to avoid mystical terminology, we should still be obliged to have recourse to it. "The essential element of the higher mystical states," says a savant, "is the experience of an external intervention which stimulates vital acts."²

There remains a beautiful metaphysical problem which I can only indicate. Although "natural,"³ is

¹ It would take too long to prove that an exclusively determinist philosophy cannot explain these phenomena. Certainly I should not dream of denying the frequent action of a physiological determinism on "inspiration." Without mentioning the contraband artifices of natural ecstasy, it is quite certain that some physiological conditions are more favourable to inspiration than others. How many problems the solution of which is obvious after the rest of a "good night," or when we reach the top of some "inspired hill"! But even if such an element were to intervene in all phenomena of inspiration it would not matter, for there would always remain in the least of these phenomena an element of mystery.

² Pacheu, *Revue de Philosophie*, loc. cit., p. 629.

³ Strictly speaking, in the historic order in which we are placed, the order of redemption, there is no "natural mysticism." All men have the same supernatural end, the beatific vision. A pagan of the days before Christ, or of our own, if saved—and he can be saved—has the same essential

profane mysticism really as fundamentally profane as I have seemed to think? Is it a silly, sacrilegious misuse of words to speak about the "religion" of beauty and of country, or is such a speaker being unconsciously guided by a profound truth? A truth, surely—and why not?—provided one does not maintain the sufficiency of such "religions" for the religious needs and duties of men. Listen to one of

recompense as the canonised saints. From which it follows that all the help God gives us has for its supreme end to lead us to the beatific vision. On the other hand, how can one fail to recognise in authentic inspirations so many helps foreseen and willed by God from all eternity, so many "means of salvation"—in fact, so many "graces"? We know, moreover, that Christ having died for all, the grace of conversion is refused to no one. Now, who does not see that the mechanism of "inspiration," as we have described it, is wonderfully adapted to divine interventions in our life, to the touches and stimulations of God? From another point of view it is not necessary, in order that "grace" should be given, that God should make this direct movement. For a savage, the mere fact of meeting a missionary at a particular moment, in particular circumstances, is already a grace. And this permits us to call "graces" certain inspirations in the analysis of which one might be disinclined—rashly perhaps—to recognise one of these divine motions. When, therefore, we speak of a natural mysticism, we simply wish to say that the "mystical states" of the poet or the hero are not the same as the "state of grace"; we would also recall the fact that the divine movements which are produced in natural mysticism differ profoundly from those other extraordinary movements which intervene in the higher mystical life, properly so called. I shall return at the end of the book to this essential difference.

the princes of *l'humanisme dévot* on the subject, the Capuchin, Yves of Paris. "From the fact," he says, "that beauty acts in an instant with such vehemence on a spiritual substance, the Platonicians have concluded that it is a divine splendour that comes to meet our reason, because it is the term of the soul's search for and attempts to reach the supreme good." "Every æsthetic experience," he says again, "is a surprise; I am adoring God, without thinking of him, in his image." And Wordsworth thinks the same in his words referring to the poetic ecstasy:

When the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world. . . .

Thus all natural mysticisms, preliminary sketches so far of the supernatural; the sudden transfigurations of our "spiritual substance"; the invisible influences that act "in an instant with such vehemence" on us—in fact, all these ineffable experiences—show us obscurely and offer us the invisible himself, the ineffable, the Being of beings, who, unknown to us, often in spite of us, envelops and penetrates us with his presence.

CHAPTER XII

ANIMUS AND ANIMA

ALL is not going well in the home of Animus and Anima. It is a long time since their short honeymoon, during which Anima had the right of speaking at her ease, while Animus listened to her ravished with delight. After all, did not the household live on the fortune brought by Anima? But not for long did Animus allow himself to be reduced to this inferior position; very soon did he show his true nature—vain, pedantic, and tyrannical. Anima is an ignoramus and a fool, she has never been to school; whereas Animus knows a heap of things, he has read a heap of things in books . . . all his friends say it is impossible to be a better talker. . . . Anima has no longer the right to say a word . . . he knows better than she what she wants to say. Animus is not faithful, but that does not prevent him being jealous, for *au fond* he knows well (no, he has finished by forgetting it) that all the fortune belongs to Anima, and that he is a beggar, and lives on what she gives him. So he is endlessly exploiting and tormenting her to get money out of her. . . . She stays silently at home to do the cooking and clean the house as best she can. . . . *Au fond* Animus is a bourgeois; he has regular habits, and likes to eat the same dinner every day. But something strange has happened. . . . One day Animus came in unexpectedly . . . he heard Anima singing to herself behind closed doors a curious

song, something that he did not know; there was no way of discovering the notes, or the words, or the key—a strange and wonderful song. Since then he has slyly tried to make her repeat it, but Anima pretends not to understand. She is silent as soon as he looks at her. The soul is silent when the mind looks at it. Then Animus thinks he will play a trick on her; he takes steps to make her think he is not present . . . little by little Anima reassures herself, she looks here and there, she listens, she sighs, she thinks herself alone, and noiselessly she goes and opens the door to her divine lover. (Paul Claudel.)

We have just seen, by means of an illustration which we can all control, that inspiration, whether mystical or poetical, simplifies and “recollects” us, which is as much as to say that it makes us pass from a surface self, complicated, distracted, and agitated, to the peaceful simplicity of a profound self. As soon as we are invited to engage in this movement of retreat, or, at least, become aware of it, we feel in a confused way that the invitation is not absurd, that the experience suggested is no merely imaginary construction. So, a winter or two ago, when Paul Claudel put forward his parable of *Animus* and *Anima*, no sound thinker took the view that he was talking nonsense. He was telling, in poetic fashion, everybody’s secret. Now Claudel evidently owes the first idea of this parable, the most luminous account yet given of poetic activity, not to the poets, but to the mystics, for it fixes in a lively and attractive symbol the fundamental dogma of mystical psychology—the distinction between the

two selves: *Animus*, the *surface self*; *Anima*, the deep self; *Animus*, rational knowledge; and *Anima*, mystical or poetic knowledge. Ah! when a poet is doubled by a philosopher, he has strange ways of humbling us. All that I could find (and with what difficulty) to make this distinction clear was to oppose the *I* to the *Me*: the *I*, who dances round the circumference of the soul, who affirms himself, and is always afraid that he does not do so sufficiently, absorbed in the contemplation and renewal of the shadows of his Chinese lantern, so busy in the narrow wings of the little theatre that he ends by no longer hearing the concerts which are given behind the scenes, the symphonies of silence; and, on the other hand, the central *Me*, who also acts, but with such peaceful intensity that the *I* thinks she is asleep, inert and passive; the *I*, who feeds on notions and words, and enchants himself by doing so; the *Me*, who is united to realities; the *Me*, who receives the visits of God; the *I*, who often delays them, obstructs them, volatilises them in words, and thus loses the benefit of them.¹

Anima, the sacred region, as Ruysbroeck, the mystic of Brabant, calls it: "Our most hidden and intimate

¹ These are obviously symbols only. What I call *I* might equally well be called *Me*. Cf., for instance, the articles of M. Franck Grandjean on *Le "Je" centre actif de la conscience*, in *Vers l'Unité, Revue internationale de synthèses spirituelles*, May, 1925. I think, however, that the symbols I have chosen correspond better to the thought of the mystics.

home, the extreme point and summit of the heart, the marrow of the soul."

This may seem an extravagance to you, my daughters, says St Teresa in her *Interior Castle*, and yet things really happen so. The soul is evidently one. Nevertheless, what I have just spoken of is no dream, but a very ordinary state. Certain interior experiences give us the certitude that, from one point of view, there is a very real difference between the soul and the mind.

Anima and Animus :

Although in reality they are one, one may sometimes see a division between them so delicate that it seems that they work in different ways. It also seems to me as if the soul was different from its powers. But there are so many and such subtle things in the intimate depth of our soul that it would be rash in me to try and explain them.

I propose to multiply quotations, but we shall not find one presenting a character so clearly philosophic and modern. So true is it that the highest poetry easily does without images ! Louis de Blois is more eloquent:

Few raise themselves above their natural faculties; few arrive at the knowledge of the peak of their spirit, the secret depths of their soul. Depth or peak far more intimate and sublime than our three highest faculties, for it is there that these faculties originate . . . something perfectly simple and essential . . . a perfect unity; for in this depth of the soul they are one and indistinguishable, each from the others. There

reigns an absolute tranquillity in the deepest silence, for no image can penetrate there. There dwells in hiding the divine Presence. A paradise, the kingdom of God, which is God himself in us. A bare and shapeless abyss, beyond time and space, its *raison d'être* being a certain perpetual adhesion to God, and yet it is essentially within us, it is us, the very essence of our soul. This abyss is illuminated by the uncreated light, and when one of its rays strikes on our faculties we are attracted to God with extraordinary force.¹

St Francis de Sales compares to the Holy of Holies this "extremity and peak of our soul," this "eminence and supreme point of reason and spiritual faculty, which is not led by the light of discourse or of reason."

There were no windows in the sanctuary to light it; at this depth of the mind, there is no discourse to illuminate it. . . . No one entered the sanctuary but the High Priest; no argument can reach this point of the soul except the great, universal, and sovereign sentiment that the divine Will should be supremely loved. . . . The High Priest, on entering the sanctuary, further darkened the light that came in at the door by burning many perfumes in his censer, the smoke of which shut out the light, and all that can be seen at the extreme point of the soul is in a way obscure and darkened by the renunciations and resignation of the soul, which does not so much wish to see the beauty of the truth and the truth of the beauty which is presented to it as to embrace and adore it.²

¹ Quoted by Dom Butler, *Western Mysticism*, new edition (London, 1926).

² *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (Annecy), i, p. 68. See also the very fine chaps. xi and xii. They are wonderful.

Antonio de Rojas, a Spanish mystic of the beginning of the seventeenth century, admirably translated by Père Cyprien de la Nativité, makes use of a whole avalanche of symbols:

God has placed his image in the most secret part of man, which is the root and depth of the soul. As to which, in order to find some support in the search to know what it is (although, indeed, according to what the soul feels in herself, *there is no foothold in that depth*), we must consider the soul as if it were an extended hand with but three fingers, for though the soul is really invisible, being a spirit, we have to make use of divisible and corporeal similitudes.

"We have only one soul, Theotimus, which is indivisible," says, on his side, St Francis de Sales.

Let us imagine that these three fingers are the three powers of the soul . . . the palm of the hand is the root of the soul, from which these three powers grow, and this root is the depth of the spirit, *Mens*, which others call the kingdom of God . . .; from this root grow all the nobility, generosity, and grandeur of the being.

And there, be it said in passing, is the foundation of mystic optimism, and in the last analysis of romantic optimism also. The *I*, the only ego realised by the classics, is a poor thing; the *Me* is good. "M. de Génève has often said to me," writes Camus, "that the confusion of these two terms, self-love (*amour propre*, the fundamental vice of the *I* of *Animus*) and the love of ourselves (*amour de nous-mêmes*, the instinct

and duty of the *Me* of *Anima*), caused a great deal of confusion in the thoughts and actions of men.”¹

The whole of the modern philosophy of “Mystical Imperialism” rests on this confusion of the *I* and the *Me*.

This being supposed, continues Rojas, in order that the soul should enter this its supreme depth in order to enjoy its Beloved, it is necessary that the understanding should be kept outside with all its messengers and ambassadors . . . and that the memory should draw a curtain in front of all these images, hiding them in such a way that it seems there are none. After which, the understanding being tranquil and peaceful and the memory at rest, there being in this interior castle a truce to quarrels and a complete cessation [no, not quite] of the exercise in which the powers of the mind were retaining the will, it must necessarily be that the soul remains alone with her Beloved, who dwells in her own root and depth.

And passing to other symbols:

Be not like those who hear an agreeable concert, and who, in order to enjoy this pleasure, promptly get out of bed and place themselves half dressed at the window . . . but when the musicians . . . perform the best piece of their programme, a little wind comes and blows in their faces, so that they at once withdraw and shut the window, and go back to bed. . . . No, do not imitate these delicate and inconstant ones. God gives you a heavenly concert, not in the street, but in the royal palace of your soul; you listen to it with contentment, and you say that it is good to

¹ Camus-Baudry, *Véritable esprit de St François de Sales*, i, p. 134.

approach this sovereign and incomparable musician . . . but what happens? The little breeze of an importunate thought, or of several, which interfere with your enjoyment of this sweet harmony, comes to you, and you immediately leave the music and return to the snug home of the senses, where you get much colder and lose all your profit. . . .¹

While we are on this subject, let us look at another doublet of Claudel's parable, the admirable letter of Francis de Sales to a religious, Peronne Marie de Châtel, whose *Anima* was very holy, but whose *Animus* caused her quite unjustifiable torments:

You say truly, my poor dear child, Peronne Marie, that there are two men, or, rather, two women, within you. One is a certain Peronne, who, as of old her patron, St Peter, is rather sensitive, irritable, and ready to give way to sadness when crossed; this Peronne is the daughter of Eve, and consequently bad-tempered. The other is a certain Peronne Marie, who has a very firm and good will to belong entirely to God, and to be simple and humble, and sweet to all her neighbours . . . and these two women are at war; and the worthless one is so bad that sometimes the good one has all she can do to protect herself from her, and at such moments the poor thing thinks that she has been beaten, and that the bad one has been the braver. But no, indeed, my poor dear Peronne Marie, that wicked one is no braver than you, but she is more self-assertive, perverse, over-reaching, and pig-headed; and when you go away and weep she is delighted, because that is always so much time lost.

¹ *La Vie de l'Esprit pour s'avancer en l'exercice de l'oraison et pour avoir une grande union avec Dieu*, composé en espagnol par le Docteur Antoine de Rojas (Lyons, 1663), pp. 332-341.

From which we may see that these speculations are not merely in the air. The masters of devout humanism base all their spiritual direction on these primary distinctions, to which the analysis of mystical experience has led them. If the Jansenist directors are much less human, it is because they only know the *I*. "The *I* is hateful." Yes, indeed, very often; but not the *Me* !

To return to metaphysics, the *Anima*, say the Scotists, is our *haecceitas*, our "thisness." You prefer Claudel or Rojas, or Francis de Sales ? I also, but is it not fitting that all tongues, even the most barbarous, should sing the glory of *Anima* ? According to the great Ossuna—one of the favourite masters of St Teresa—resistance to the persecutions of *Animus*—

would be absolutely impossible if human nature were not able to find arms at her disposal in her *haecceitas*. *Haecceitas*, intimately united to nature, will not oppose or paralyse the work of reason, but will embank and regulate it, will protect it from an exteriorising dissipation which exposes it [the reason] to the danger of becoming the slave of everything. . . . Child of the free-will of God, my *haecceitas* has an eminently liberating influence. It is the individuating principle of my being, and tends to disengage me from everything which is not myself, in order to concentrate me on and bring me back to my interior, towards that great vacuum that it has dug in the most intimate depth of my real being. . . . There God is at home. Once there, the will [it is specially by the will that *haecceitas* works] has nothing to do but let itself go towards its natural inclination for the supreme love

of the infinite good. . . . Silence, then, these tumultuous and dislocating thoughts . . . shut the door firmly on them. Silence your turbulent understanding; far from being any use to you, it can but increase in you confusion and multiply obstacles to grace.¹

The same psychology with Plotinus, though his metaphysics is not at all the same as that of our mystics:

Unifying contemplation occurs when the soul has closed its doors on everything that takes it out of itself; when it has made silence in its senses, its faculties, and its intelligence, the intelligence which in reasoning and knowing distinguishes itself from its object; when, in a word, it thinks by means of the *νοῦς καθ'αυτὸς*, the fine point of the mind.

Not the same "fine point" as that of our mystics. To a man thus separated from the *effusio ad exteriora*—Pascal's *divertissement*—

it is given to touch God, for God gives himself to him. He causes suddenly to shine an unexpected light. He invades and possesses the soul as inspiration ravishes the spirits of initiates or prophets,

or poets, although these texts—and such may be found on every page of the mystics—attack poetry as much as they exalt it. But, once more, there is no question of maintaining the equality of poetic

¹ Michel-Ange, *Ossuna et Duns Scot.*, *Etudes Franciscaines*, xxiv (1910), p. 405. "Thus to actualise oneself," says further Père Michel-Ange, "by what is best in us, our will, our love, is to make us more and more *ourselves*" (*ibid.*, p. 641).

experience and that of contemplatives, but merely of illuminating the former by the latter. The less known, that of the poets, by the better known, by that which precisely, because it is more perfect, lends itself to a less confused analysis, and the recognition in both cases of "analogies of form and communities of mechanisms." Pure æsthetics has also sketched, though tentatively, this map of the soul on the same lines as the mystics. Hegel, for instance, when he wishes to explain the strange power of music, says:

It acts principally on the sensibility [not the right word, in our opinion]; it does not go so far as to awaken the conceptions of the understanding.

This is not quite exact either; it does awaken conceptions, it does stimulate the intelligence, but by an after-thought, so to say, as we shortly explain.

Or to evoke in the spirit images which distract its attention.

[The same reserve as before.]

It is concentrated on the profound region of sentiment [that is to say, much higher than the zone of the senses, properly so called].

Placed at this seat of the interior changes of the soul, at that central part of the whole man, inspiration gives him a shock which sets his nature quivering; the man is not only seized by this or that side of his being, or by a *determinate thought*, his uncomplex self, the centre of his spiritual existence, is carried away and set in movement.

It seems to me that Hegel often had the presentiment that the same might be said of poetry and all the arts, but his metaphysic, so far, at least, as I can understand it, did not allow him to realise his own intuitions. Placing himself at another point of view, and more interested in morals than in poetry, Scherer speaks like our mystics:

A diary, he says at the beginning of his *Journal d'un égotiste*, is a return on oneself, a solemn conversation of the false ego, exterior, dissipated, artificial, with the true and interior ego; it is a religious exploration of the great and sombre sanctuary of the soul. I mean the last of our souls. For we have several souls, just as there are several heavens. . . . There are few, indeed, who find the last circle of this spiral.

Not so very few! Almost everyone, and the poets as well, penetrate it; that is where the flash of inspiration conducts them; what is very rare is that any should remain there and instal themselves, if I may say so, in these depths.

At rare moments elect souls themselves reach the very bottom [oh, surely never!]. A singular thing; nothing is less conscious of what it is doing than the consciousness.

It is not at all singular; properly speaking, we have no consciousness of our deepest being, for it is not our intelligence which makes us penetrate to it. And that is why I carefully avoid all such words as subconscious, unconscious, etc., which, applied to the activities of

Anima, seem to involve a contradiction; for consciousness implies reflection, and *Anima* does not reflect; she is content to invite *Animus* to reflect.

Everybody has one, no doubt, but in a state of sleep; it is as if it was not. Like the Sleeping Beauty in her castle, which was in the middle of a wood surrounded by a desert. We live on the surface of life; we fear, avoid, and play hide-and-seek with ourselves.

Take care what you are saying; in order thus to flee oneself, must one not in some way or other, at least by moments, have found oneself? Are there not narrow paths winding from the desert to the wood, from the wood to the castle?

We have a thousand tricks to get rid of our importunate creditor, and the habit of these tricks grows on us so much that at last we execute master-strokes of deception, being hardly aware of doing so.

He is repeating, unawares, the mystics:

This prayer, writes Père Rigoleuc, goes on in the depth of the soul where God resides as in a secret sanctuary, far from the noise and tumult of creatures. But it is closed to most people through their own fault. There are very few people who will put themselves in the requisite conditions for entering it, or who have sufficient recollection and purity to arrive at it.

In the little review which Marcel Proust published with his comrades of the Lycée Condorcet, *Le Banquet*, M. Robert Dreyfus has discovered a "page worthy,"

he says, "to strengthen the recent *éclaircissement* of M. l'Abbé Bremond in the matter of 'Pure Poetry.'" Yes, indeed! but judge for yourselves.

Tel qu'en songe (by Henri de Régnier) prepares for those persons who do not love poetry (that is, who only ask from poetry a pleasure of the intellectual order) a cruel deception . . . nothing material to hang on to, nothing but a blue and rustling infinite . . ., without any remains of earth. . . . Above what is generally called intelligence, philosophers try to discover a superior reason, one and infinite, like sentiment, at one and the same time the *object and instrument* of their meditations. *Tel qu'en songe* realises and presents us with a little of this reason, of this mysterious and profound sentiment of things.

Already wonderful, he understands before he understands. On which M. Robert Dreyfus says: "This superior reason [*Anima*], surpassing the intelligence, is it not both the object and the instrument of the meditations of Marcel Proust, as he will one day present them in *À la recherche du temps perdu*?¹ Instrument, of course, a real poet has no other; but also the principal "object," unique, indeed, of the Proustian philosophy—I mean of what does not appear in the work of Proust.

M. Pierre-Quint has clearly explained all this in his *Marcel Proust*. I cannot do better than quote him:

Human consciousness, he writes, is covered, according to Bergson's image—

¹ Robert Dreyfus, *Souvenirs sur Marcel Proust* (*Revue de France*, April 15, 1926).

An image which connects itself at once with the thousand symbols of our mystics and with Claudel's parable—

with a thick crust formed of our solidified habits . . . it is there in that conscious crust that we find already wound-up mechanisms and ready-made sentiments for our daily work and conversations. But underneath this thin surface exists the richer, the essential part of our self, which hardly ever intervenes in our daily activity!¹ We shout, we laugh, we even shed tears, without our deeper personality having to come on the stage. . . . Two or three times in our existence at most, suddenly, our interior consciousness springs up, and we commune for a minute in a new feeling with another being. In that instant the authentic individual who is within us is expressed.

Now the singular thing about the mystics on the one hand and the poets on the other is that such experiences are familiar to them. Instead of that "thick crust," the wing of a dragon-fly. *Anima* in their case is, so to speak, at the surface of the skin. The slightest shock is enough to make her appear.

"Vinteuil," writes Marcel Proust, "attained with the whole power of his creative effort his own essence at those depths at which every question is answered with the same accent—that is, his own"; and Bergson writes: "Between nature and us—what am I saying?—between us and our own consciousness there is a veil interposed, thick for most men, but light, almost

¹ This seems to me extreme.

transparent, for the artist and the poet."¹ Lighter still, even more transparent, for the mystic, and from that comes this very curious phenomenon which the æsthetic of reason will never explain to us, and which is enough to condemn it, that *unique accent*, to which those great singers, who are the original musicians, rise and return in spite of themselves, which is the proof of the irreducible and individual existence of the soul.

The impression given by the phrases of Vinteuil was different from any other, as if, in spite of the conclusions which appear to result from science, the individual really existed.

But, great heaven ! the individual is all that does exist.

It was precisely when he tried to the full extent of his power to be novel that one recognised, under the apparent differences which declared themselves under different colours, the profound and unconscious similitudes existing between the two distinct master-pieces.

Sensation and sentiment, in the narrow sense of the word, images, ideas—above all, ideas—nothing is less impersonal; it is the land of *Animus*, a no-man's land, a granary which all may enter. He who has nothing else to offer us is no poet. The incommunicable stamp, always the same, is given by *Anima*. Hence the complete absurdity of squabbles about

¹ Léon Pierre-Quint, *Marcel Proust, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, 1925), pp. 236, 237.

plagiarism, and even for one who places himself solely at the æsthetic point of view of the mania of "sources."¹ That the *Animus* of Molière should snatch his good wherever he can find it is a dull piece of news! *Animus* is the very genius of theft, a little more or a little less, what does it matter? A simple versifier, whether consciously or not, can only live on plunder, or, if you prefer it, on reminiscences. Has he invented the mortality of man and the colour of the gentian?

What has just been said in no way justifies—indeed, rather corrects and helps us both to explain and to *disinfect* the definition which Brunetière gave of romanticism, and, still more, the philosophy of M. Seillière. "The triumph of individualism," said Brunetière, "or the total and absolute emancipation of the self. Who is the *individual* whose triumph romanticism prepares?" Lately we sang, "We have but to save our souls. That is our purpose, that is our only business." Must this song be put on the Index as an inducement to pride and lust—the two monsters coupled by M. Seillière, and baptised by him "Mystical Imperialism"?

There are two selves: first of all the surface self, often made of froth; the self of anecdotes and petty events; the self of pride and lust, and all the capital sins; the self of whom one can say that on such a day

¹ "An imitative writer who borrows a characteristic from another author gains nothing, for, at the same time, he ought to borrow another self" (*Poétique* . . . of Jean Paul Richter, Paris, 1862, ii, p. 47).

he said such a word, performed such an action, started on such an adventure, committed such an enormity. No sooner has this evanescent and contradictory self, made up of thoughts, actions, and good or evil passions, been manifested, than it dies, giving place to another, which both is and yet is not himself. The self around whom the jealousy, the hatred, the love of others fight, and in whom they are absorbed, the self of the surface. Always better or worse than he appears, always a liar, often an actor. This is the self, no doubt prodigiously interesting, at once tragic and comical, of which the moralists make their principal dish; the self of La Bruyère, the self, not, indeed, of classical poetry, but of classicism. And it is this self, this *next-to-nothing*, that they call Man.

And there is the self which endures, image and temple of God, the self of all inspirations, the hearth whereon all true poetry and heroism are set alight. None of the attitudes which it takes externally define it, none of the activities of which it is the source exhaust it, none of its capitulations enslave it. It is he, no doubt, who thinks, but in such a way that none of his thoughts really express him; he who acts, but he loses nothing, and survives complete after any and all of his actions; he who loves, but not one of his loves either satisfies or betrays him. As strong as the other self; nevertheless, almost as void. But a living void, a void which is also a real need, a real disquiet, a real prayer, the dimly anticipated and initiated possession, the "capacity of God." Since this self is,

above all, potentiality of love, and never set in motion except towards union with what will give satisfaction, Scripture, St Augustine and Pascal call it the "heart." The fine point, the centre or the apex of the soul, say the mystics; *Anima*, says Paul Claudel. Such is the self which the essential, the eternal romanticism wishes to emancipate, not from reason or the laws of morals or dogma—for that kind of emancipation we have not had to wait. Eve, in the earthly paradise, gave the signal for it—but from the tyranny of the other self. Not individualism, but super-individualism, since this jargon is considered important.

The theoreticians of classicism take no interest in the second and the richest of these two selves. What is more fundamentally frivolous than Boileau's *Art Poétique*? Not once, while he was working at it, did he ask himself the question: *Quid hoc ad aeternitatem*? I understand by *aeternitas* what has value for the deeper life, what answers to the disquiet of *Anima*. This is why Boileau's sort of poet, if mediocre, becomes intolerable to us. For him there is no medium between absolute artistic perfection and non-existence. For the romantics there is a medium. We should certainly like Sainte-Beuve better perfect, but his worst prosaisms—*Monsieur Jean*!—do not leave us indifferent. Can one imagine more irritating awkwardness than that of La Morvonnais? Yet what reader who is, I do not say a Christian, but even a poet, does not prefer him to Delille? Sainte-Beuve sings laboriously:

Heureux dont le langage impétueux et doux
En servant la pensée, est toujours en dessous !

No, indeed, thrice accurst if he is below the level of his "thoughts"! Why put into obscure and clumsy verses what could be expressed admirably in prose? But happy—yes—to "serve" the untranslatable inspirations of *Anima* at any cost:

Qui laissant déborder l'urne de poésie,
N'en répand qu'une part et sans l'avoir choisie;
Et dont la sainte lyre, incomplète parfois,
Marque une âme attentive à de plus graves lois !

Attentive to the inspiration, the dictation of *Anima*:

Son défaut m'est aimable, et de près m'édifie.

Must I add that defect as such has nothing particularly edifying about it? The ideal is not that *Animus* should stammer. Is the *Divine Comedy* more romantic and poetic than *Le Lutrin* of a more accomplished art? Not so far as I know. But the greater perfection of the *Divine Comedy* consists precisely in the fact that it is not only perfect. At the very moment when it satisfies all the demands of *Animus*, it revives the desires of *Anima*. The more it enchants our taste, our ear, our reason, the more will it disturb us in our depths, the more will it awaken the *cor irrequietum*, the better self, in which it may be safely said that Boileau, the theorist of poetry, does not take the slightest interest. Am I mixing everything up, æsthetics and a sermon? Ah, it is not I who do so. Æsthetic pleasure not being our last end, it must needs

be that *Anima* should remain unsatisfied but exalted, the prey of the sufferings of the void. "To be at ease is to be unsafe," said Newman. A conscience which, without disquiet, assists at the gymnastics of the surface self as at a game of tennis is sick, is in danger. This law of all moral and religious life is also the first principle of poetics. You will not find it in Boileau, but you will find it more or less confusedly realised, presented in more or less bizarre fashion in all the romantics.

Manzoni asks why Shakespeare is a better Christian and a better poet than Racine. You may think he will reply that it is because there is a friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. No, it is because with Shakespeare we descend deeper into the heart—*piu si va in fondo al cuore*—because Shakespeare is more constantly and more intensely the poet of the deeper self. "Shakespeare, a great religious poet," said Newman, who was not the man to trifle with such words. Mrs. Oliver Ward Campbell has recently published a very remarkable book—*Shelley and the Unromantics*—which gives a definition of romanticism, a definition almost as mystical—although the word frightens Mrs. Campbell—as those which these meditations are meant to suggest. For Mrs. Campbell, romanticism does not consist in the discovery of cathedrals, the return to nature, the search for the picturesque or the *macabre*, still less the bridle on the neck of passion and that canonisation of the capital sins which so much distresses—and I understand his distress—Baron

Seillères. All that is but the more or less logical consequences—parasitic outgrowths, the foam, the scum of romanticism. Byron, Walter Scott, and even Coleridge had but the style of the movement. Mrs. Campbell admits only three pure romantics: Shelley, Wordsworth, and Keats. She certainly wants her romantics too pure, but so many want them decidedly too stupid or too infamous, that this slight excess is very pardonable. Be this as it may, here is her definition of the essence of romanticism:

A certain faith in man, perhaps a mystical faith, which rests on none of the brilliant manifestations of his power, but on the feeling of the essential grandeur of the soul—on the hope that, perhaps, it is more than mortal.

This is very strong. A certain *faith in man*, and a quasi-mystical faith, which therefore goes beyond the simple, dry, and shaky rational certitudes; a defiance of death, hesitating, perhaps, but strong enough to thrill us. Mrs. Campbell's own philosophy does not allow her apparently to go further; but for a Christian nothing easier than to breathe life into that "perhaps," and to probe to the very root of that essential grandeur which is the presence of God in us. Christian romanticism is the only perfect type; through the eyes of every romantic peers a Pascal, a Christian, if not in fact, at least in desire or tendency.

It is easy to shrug one's shoulders. But, after all, this philosophy of poetry and romanticism is not a product of the sacristy. "For me," says Mr. Middle-

ton Murry, "the fundamental problem is to define the relations between religion and literature." A new and purely romantic problem. It is, in fact, thanks to romanticism that literature has ceased to be a mere amusement, Malherbe's game of skittles, Boileau's worship of stylistic complications, to become the *great religious adventure of the human soul*. And the prize of this religious adventure can be nothing but the liberation of *Anima*.

In this article of the *Criterion*, entitled *Romanticism and Tradition*¹ (1924), which I am briefly resuming, Mr. Middleton Murry repeats in his own way Mrs. Campbell's definitions. For him as well, romanticism is essentially a *certain kind of faith in man*, but he further wishes, and this is of capital importance, that this act of faith should be explicitly religious in the proper sense of the word, this true profound consciousness that we have of ourselves, implying a meeting with God in our interior, a definite contact with God.

If, therefore, as I believe, religion is the fundamental reality of the human soul; if the consciousness of the soul itself demands for its very existence the consciousness of God; if the lesser I AM can only be in virtue of the greater I AM from which it draws its life—then literature, which is a manifestation of that same soul whose deepest anatomy is contained in religion, must inevitably be knit up with, be indissolubly bound to,

¹ Republished under the title of "Literature and Religion" in his admirable book, *The Unknown God* (London, Cape).

religion. There is no escape. Religion and literature are branches of the same everlasting root.¹

This intuition of our deeper self and of the divine presence which dwells in it—we Christians boldly say, which deifies it—and is thereby the foundation of its grandeur; this intuition may be called mystic, if one will (that does not frighten Mr. Murry). The important thing to know about it is that it is what in the last analysis distinguishes the romantic movement. *This was at the creative centre of Wordsworth, of Shelley, of Keats and of Coleridge.* And it is also the creative centre of Shakespeare.

For Mr. Middleton Murry, romanticism thus understood is today, and has been for the last three or four centuries, a movement of revolt against everything which impedes the full development of the deeper self, and notably against the tyranny of the Churches. Catholicism would thus be a classicism, and every priest a Boileau. It goes without saying that such is not my opinion, and that this is not the place for me to explain my views on this point. I will simply recall a fact: the number and splendour of the Catholic mystics, that marvellous mystical renaissance set in movement precisely by the counter-reformation. St Teresa was born some forty years before Shakespeare; our French mystics of the seventeenth century precede by a century or two Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley. And Mr. Middleton Murry

¹ Middleton Murry, *op. cit.*, pp. 163, 164.

himself, in order the more fully to explain his philosophy of poetry, finds nothing better than to have recourse to the Catholic mystics.¹

¹ A parable, however luminous and beneficent, is, after all, but a parable. This applies to Claudel's *Animus* and *Anima*, as to all the images employed by mystics: apex, point, centre, surface of the soul, etc. To take them so literally that the poetical or mystical experience is isolated from other human activities would be folly. It is natural and useful that mystics and poets, when they are endeavouring to describe an indefinable experience, should accentuate the difference between real and rational knowledge. But it is indispensable that philosophers, while making that distinction their own, should, in their turn, put the accent on the essential and constant solidarity which binds these two kinds of knowledge together; on the interdependence of these two activities, which are both equally distorted—in fact, paralysed—if they are induced to quarrel. That is indispensable, I say, not only to a philosophy of knowledge, but also to a philosophy of the will, and consequently to a philosophy of the interior life and of prayer. Do not let us under pretext of glorifying the gift of God, without which there is no true prayer, exclude from mysticism all rational, moral, and ascetical preparation, in order to see in it only a pure emotionalism, a total *passivity*; this is the road to hollow sentimentalism or to quietism. The *ascesis* is not prayer; but without a minimum of *ascesis* there is no true prayer. If *Animus* will not bear his cross, the ecstasy of *Anima* will be nothing but an illusion. I say all this that the reader may grasp the indefinite bearing of Claudel's parable, and to enable me once more to declare the multiple insufficiencies of the very summary synthesis which I am attempting to outline here.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPECIFIC ACTIVITY OF THE MYSTICS

AND while the psychology of the mystics helps us to determine the home of all poetic experience—that deep zone, that point or centre—so it gives us the means of constructing a certain idea, or, rather, of outlining a certain description of that mysterious activity, which is developed in the course of this experience, which is, indeed, this experience itself.

Activity, we say, but of such an intensity that the word—the only one with which the dictionary of *Animus* presents us—is much too weak, so weak that mystical literature does not care to use it. Mystical writers prefer to speak of passive states, a still more improper term, which runs the risk of perpetuating a lamentable equivocation. It is, in fact, certain that, in the highest contemplation, the activity of the surface faculties appears strangely reduced. *Acts* cease, say the mystics, the faculties become suspended or paralysed. Since they affirm this, we must believe them, though their affirmation must be found to agree with even more incontestable certitudes; but it is still more necessary to understand that a redoubling of the deeper activities of the soul corresponds automatically—as the effect to the cause—to this cessation, whatever

it may be. Man acts no longer, he is *acted*, they love to say. Let us accept this magnificent solecism ! But the mystic adheres to the external force which *acts* him with his whole being, putting forth in this adhesion, which is in itself an act, the act of acts, an energy in comparison with which the most concentrated attention of *Animus* seems pure inertia. *Dilata os tuum et implebo illud.* *Anima* dilates herself in order to welcome the divine gift, to cause it to penetrate to her ultimate fibres.

What does this adhesion mean ? "There are," replies Père de Grandmaison, "moments in which man has an immediate, experimentally perceived knowledge of God."¹ "To a superficial observer," writes Père Maréchal, "the mystical state is a Proteus of manifold and fleeting forms, barely connected by some undecided note of pathological religiosity." Again, among the manifestations of this state, the too limited view of essayists, physicians unversed in psychology, or unenlightened devotees, has too often only been able to discern somatic phenomena, bizarre forms of piety, and the crudely marvellous. Among serious inquirers, thank God, an agreement seems to have been reached at the present day to distinguish carefully between the essential and the accessory in mysticism. And on the actual delimitation of this frontier, delicate task as it is, authors of the most varying tendencies are beginning to be almost in agreement.

¹ Grandmaison, *loc. cit* , p. 319.

We may judge of this from the two or three examples that follow.

Père Poulain—in a very well documented book, which does not aim at the psychological criticism of mysticism—says of “mystical states” that “their real differentiation lies in this: God is not satisfied merely to help us to think of him, and to remind us of his presence; he gives us an *experimental, intellectual knowledge of this presence*.” This is, in truth, the fundamental mystical phenomenon—the direct feeling of God’s presence, or the *intuition of God as present*. The remainder—physical ecstasy, suspension of the senses, sensible or imaginary visions, interior words, levitations, miracles, clairvoyance, etc.—are pure accessories, which may or may not accompany the fundamental state, and the immediate causes of which may be diverse.

M. Boutroux makes the same judicious distinction: “The essential phenomenon of mysticism is what is called ecstasy—a state in which all communication with the external world is interrupted, and the soul has the feeling that it is in communication with an interior object, which is God, the infinite Being. . . .” “It would be easy,” continues Père Maréchal, “to multiply quotations”—easy, yes, and more instructive, but here too lengthy a process, to appeal to the harmonious witness of the mystics themselves. We are then compelled, in the rapid sketch of some mystical states which we are going to make, to take as our centre of perspective the culminating point of these states—

that is, *the feeling of the immediate presence of a Transcendent Being.*"¹

Since we are here studying mysticism solely as a function of poetry, if one may say so, I have no need to prove scientifically that, on the whole, we may place confidence in the testimony of the mystics. For my own case, their history alone, taken *en bloc*, assures me that they cannot be either deceivers or visionaries. In point of fact, without ever becoming banal, they nevertheless, each in his own way, translate one and the same experience. They may not know each other, but they always seem to be copying each other. This is, perhaps, the most moving fact in their history. The difference between so many witnesses does but make more striking the agreement of their evidence. "They are Italians, Englishmen, Netherlanders, Germans, Spaniards, or Frenchmen; monks or seculars, theologians or simple Christians, contemporaries of St Bernard or of Philip II . . . of the authentic race of writers, or unlettered peasants; by the side of many individual peculiarities, certain lines stand out always the same in what they say. Certain knots always form themselves in the same way, concentrating at the same points the subtle dust of psychological observation; certain phrases are always spontaneously repeated to characterise the stages of their spiritual ascension. On the essential matter . . . there is agreement."

¹ Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*, pp. 102, 103.

What is this essential matter? We have already been told in learned words; here it is once more resumed by Père de Grandmaison in a few cautious and fervent sentences:

1. There exist moments, brief and unforeseeable, in which man has the feeling of entering, not by an effort, but in answer to a call, into immediate contact, without images or discourse, but not without light, with an infinite goodness.

2. This quasi-experimental perception of God, of very variable intensity and clarity, at once a painful and a delicious experience, is ineffable. The least inadequate methods of description are those borrowed from the operations of the senses: taste, savour, sight, touch . . . there is no term quite adequate to rendering an impression so novel, so special, so powerful.

3. The knowledge resulting from it is no less *sui generis*. It is ordinarily very general and poor in details, and communicable elements . . . it consists rather in the giving of an assurance, as it were, a light falling on a living reality, and illuminating it in *depth*.

4. In spite of this generality, mystical knowledge is habitually rich in affective tone, incomparably strong in penetration and interior illumination. A sort of immediate, indisputable, and *imposed* evidence is substituted for dry abstractive knowledge.

5. These characteristics of the mystical life justify the language usually employed in writings of this kind. . . . How can this impression be rendered? Its force, its unexpectedness, its originality, force the mystics to have recourse to the most striking expressions. . . . As it is a question of a unitive knowledge, they naturally choose their terms of comparison from the closest forms of human union . . . as it is a question of

direct and immediate perceptions, or that give the impression of being such, they naturally have recourse to metaphors drawn from the operations of the senses. A complete organism of spiritual senses seems to be at their disposition . . . as, finally, it is a question of an extremely powerful impression, which shakes the human instrument to its depths, and exacts from it an extraordinary tension, the mystics will prefer antithesis, opposing terms, ranged face to face, and pressed to the point of mutual contradiction. Such violence of expression both indicates and relieves their impotence to tell all. . . .

6. A last and most important characteristic is the note of one and all Christian mystics, although inadequate and incomplete descriptions, and still more an ignorant hagiography, may sometimes have suggested the contrary. It is that the essence of the state of "infused contemplation" consists in the sole act described above—that is to say, the felt contact, and that (if we accept the impressions of the experients) without intermediary, of the First Love. Where this sentiment of immediate presence is wanting there is not, and where it exists there is, mystical contemplation.¹

At this point, why should I once more repeat—I should have to do so at each succeeding stage of our inquiry—that there is no question of likening the poet's dim night-light to the sun of the contemplative; a profane, and, after all, a fairly common experience, to an experience that is wholly supernatural, and one not granted to all Christians, even to those who are very devout? It is solely a question of seeking in the most wonderful introspective literature that exists, some

¹ Grandmaison, *loc. cit.*, pp. 324-328.

lights on the mechanism of poetic experience. Poetic experience is, in my opinion, a gift of God—indeed, a grace, an activity essentially directed towards prayer, as Mr. Middleton Murry said just now; but even if it were less supernatural than as a fact it is, were it completely profane, worldly, frivolous even, it would none the less be a sort of knowledge distinct from notional knowledge, a “simple gaze of the spirit, without formation of species,” a direct, immediate, global perception or an obscure seizing of the real, a feeling of presence, a contact, a profound touch, a “unitive knowledge,” the outline of a possession, a realisation, a “real knowledge.”

Beyond ideas, images, the sentiments of sensation—but, of course, through the intermediary of all the surface activities—poetic knowledge attains and unites the poet to realities. Not directly to the sovereign reality, God—that is the exclusive privilege of mystical knowledge—but to all the created real, and underneath the created reality, indirectly to God himself. . . . Lyric verse is the attainment of the deeper self, dramatic and narrative poetry a similar attainment *by* the deeper self of other realities. But these distinctions seem vain enough; lyric verse, the stirring up of the deeper self, and poetry are all one. Here I can do nothing but refer to the *Sonate de Vinteuil*. As an analysis of poetic knowledge, I know nothing more exact, except Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and a few pages of Patmore in *Religio Poetae*. To quote once more the penetrating commentaries of M. Pierre-Quint:

The world reflects itself (is seized, possessed) in a particular and unique manner in the consciousness of each artist. "Each artist seems thus to be the citizen of an unknown country [*Anima*], which he has forgotten . . .," and the more the artist approaches this country [the more his apprehension is vivid and direct], the greater the beauty that his art will reach. . . . It is to this country, so profoundly buried in the consciousness, that Proust himself tries to return in order to find and reproduce the essence of his impressions, a labour which is at the basis of his books, and which we have called the method of his exploration in depth.

It is, indeed, the method which spontaneously imposes itself on every poet. Proust's great merit is to have had so clear a perception of it.

Drawn from the most secret part of the artist, the work of art will not reproduce the world according to the conventional images [and notions] of the public. It will distort the appearances of reality precisely in order to reach reality.

Distortion, not exact imitation. *Animus* suffices for imitation. -

The reality which he must reach by piercing the solid layer of his self . . . never presents itself to him quite pure.

It offers itself like a gift, like the dew to the earth like love to love; but, as we have said, the deeper soul cannot make this gift its own except at the price of an intense activity. Whence the effort and the joy which follows it.

Our joy results, in fact, from our own communion with a part of the external world.

Still more, with ourselves; the possession of external realities, bringing us back triumphantly to that profound self which is united with them.

A communion which really associates our deeper being with the essence of things. . . . Neither salons nor travels . . . [nor anything which limits the activity of *Animus*] can bring us this mystic fusion of our life with the life that surrounds us, because neither the one nor the other is powerful enough to permit us to escape from our ego and burst its bark . . . art alone realises this miracle.

Why art alone? The mystical union realises it far more intensely:

What the writer will find beyond images and notions and intellectual constructions, let us not weary of repeating, in the communion between the external world and himself, is so different from the habitual course of his life, that he divines that happiness is concealed there . . . art also permits the individual to express his original impulse by methods beyond the limits of ordinary language or pure logical ideas. The combined efforts [very good!] of his intelligence and his intuition permit him to touch reality in joy.

This is that "serene and blessed mood" of which Wordsworth speaks:

In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul;
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.¹

We see into the life of things. "My personages influence and pursue me," said Flaubert, "or, rather, I myself become them."² This is a commonplace of mystical theology. One text of a thousand will suffice: "It is the habit of good lovers to live rather in the object of their love than in themselves. It is there that they keep their thoughts, and they do not exist in what they eat and drink, nor in what they do, but rather in the object they love."³

So also in Mohammedan mysticism: "I was a drop lost in the ocean of mystery," says the author of the *Language of the Birds*, "and now I can no longer find that drop."⁴

And that divine little poem which Fitzgerald translated from Persian:

The lover knocks at the door of the Beloved, and a voice replies from within: "Who is there?" "It is I," he said; and the voice replied: "There is no room for thee and me in this house." And the door remained shut. Then the lover retired to the desert, and fasted and prayed in solitude. After a year he came back, and knocked once more at the door. Once more the voice asked: "Who is there?" He replied: "It is thyself." And the door opened to him.

¹ "Lines on Tintern Abbey."

² Cassagne, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

³ A. de Rojas, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴ Quoted by Maréchal, *op. cit.*

Edgar Poe remarks, apropos of Hamlet, that in crises of intoxication or madness the sufferer finds himself irresistibly impelled to exaggerate dramatically his own exaltation; he wishes to appear even less master of himself than he really is; there is an actor in every delirious patient. He continues:

Shakespeare did not form that concept, he did not explicitly state it to himself; he *felt* it. He felt it, thanks to his marvellous power of self-identification with all that is human—the power that in the last analysis makes all the magic of Shakespeare. He is making Hamlet speak. Having first of all imagined mental disorder in his hero as the result of the ghost's revelations, he feels that Hamlet would proceed in his excitement to exaggerate his delirium.

This Shakespeare felt, not thought. It gives in a word what Mr. Bradley explained to us just now at greater length. Why not, one may ask, be content with Edgar Poe's living formula? Well, because such words as "feel" and "feeling" are equivocal in significance, and, when taken in their straightforward meaning, designate one of our surface activities. "Feeling" here, like the "sensation" of Keats's letters, means poetic and unitive knowledge, the ardent and massive adhesion of the whole soul to the Real offered to it.

People are never tired of repeating that the classics excelled in the knowledge of man. If one means by that a notional and abstract knowledge of the young man, the old man, the jealous man, the miser, the lover, as such, it is true, but that is no poetic knowledge.

If Racine had no other merit, we should have to place him below the great moralists and preachers. For the psychological analysis of the passions the intelligence of *Animus* suffices; it is one of his natural subjects. But Racine only teaches us—what can be called teaching—about Andromache or Phèdre what we already know, or what professional psychologists would teach us a great deal better. What he does is something else, and what alone a poet can do: he excels in the poetic knowledge of souls. Identifying himself with, not at first the passionate movements of Andromache or Phèdre, but with their very being, endowed as he is with a marvellous art which enables him to transmit to us something of what he feels himself at this apprehension, this contact, he renders present and sensible to our deeper self the deeper self of his personages. Thus do all the poets, and with them the novelists and historians of genius, Balzac, Stendhal, Michelet, Péguy, for example. In the case of so-called psychological novelists, even, what they directly and explicitly teach us about psychology is, taken all together, very little. Whatever it be, little or much, their actually didactic message can be made soup of—as Madame de Sévigné said of the essays of Nicole—or fitted into a table of contents. After that, if they were novelists only, there would be no need to reread them, but since the poetic knowledge to which they invite us and which they provoke in us is by definition as impossible to formulate as to *exhaust*, we recommence them indefinitely. It is quite true, also, that

this poetic knowledge of souls stimulates our natural faculties of knowledge and our psychological curiosity, and suggests to us endless meditations on the nature and ravages of passion. But these are no longer the intuitions of a poet, but the meditations of a moralist.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NECESSARY COLLABORATION OF "ANIMUS" AND "ANIMA"

AS a matter of fact, the bridges are never cut between these two modes of knowledge, *Animus* and *Anima*; not only have they no need to cut one another's throats, but they cannot do without each other. If *Anima* should—by an irrealisable feat of prowess—throw her *Animus* out of the window, she would at once change her name, and be classified a little below the instinct of the animals; should *Animus* succeed, miraculously if at all, in getting rid of *Anima*, he would at once play the piteous part of a bird under an air-pump or a fish out of water. It might be thought that because we distinguish them we wish to make them fight. But no! Where has it been seen that the flame is at war with the hearth, the flower with its own roots? There is only the one and same indivisible soul which has a centre and a surface; which discusses the real and which possesses it; which could not discuss it if in some way or other it had not begun by possessing it; and which, if it did not discuss it, or at least rationalise it in some way, would possess it in vain. Exchanges of action and reaction are being constantly

made between intellectual and poetic knowledge. On the one hand, the immediate apprehension of the real stirs, directs, makes the intelligence and the will to glow; on the other, the intelligence and the will render our obscure possession of the real more fertile and closer in proportion as they are in touch with the influences that radiate from the centre.

Let us represent to ourselves the mystic—what I am going to say is, under the reserves already made and now repeated, equally true of the poet—at the moment when, taking up again our common life and normal methods of knowledge, he tries to explain to himself or communicate to us the impressions that he has been passing through. He reflects, he meditates, he speaks, he writes. Now he is the same as the rest of us, for I have no need to say that mental activities do not become mystical by being applied to our remembrance of a mystical or poetic experience. What does he want to do now? To retain, to fix this more or less intermittent experience, to prolong it as much as possible in the order of the only knowledge which remains possible to him—rational knowledge, with its indispensable cortège of images and concepts.

What do you think will happen when he comes down from mystical to rational knowledge? An agony of impotence, despairing efforts in the night, a vain tension of the whole being towards the love that has been lost; finally, the complaint of Magdalen: *Ubi posuistis eum?* No, often quite the contrary, and normally it should be the contrary. This twilight,

this night seems to spread more light than the high noon. In contemplation, writes Tauler:

'The spirit is transported high above all the powers, into a sort of immense solitude, of which no mortal can speak fittingly. This is the mysterious darkness in which the limitless good is hidden. The soul is admitted into and absorbed by something that is one, simple, divine, unlimited, and this to such an extent that the soul, as it seems, becomes indistinguishable from it. I do not speak of the reality, but only of the appearance, of the impression experienced. In this unity the feeling of multiplicity is effaced. *When afterwards these men come back to themselves*, they find in their minds a distinct, *more luminous, more perfect* knowledge of things.¹

In the same way St Teresa, that queen of mystical psychology, says:

When God raises the soul to union, he suspends the natural action of all her powers, so as better to imprint on her true wisdom. Therefore she neither sees, nor hears, nor understands while she remains united to God. But you will ask me how it can be that the soul should have seen or heard that she has been in God and God in her, if during that union she neither sees nor hears. I reply that she does not see it at the time, but she sees it clearly afterwards, when she has come back to herself, and she knows it, not by a (subsequent) vision, but by a certitude which God alone can give her, and which remains with her.

Thus mystical knowledge is like a dark curtain, which, on falling, discovers to rational knowledge, luminous

¹ *First Sermon for the Second Sunday after Epiphany*, ed. Noel.

perspectives. In proportion as that real but obscure possession of the Being of beings relaxes, the mystic's powers, his intelligence, his will, his imagination seem to receive new strength, take flight, besiege and attain to that Being of beings in their own way and with a singular vivacity. In that ecstasy which seemed to reduce them to immobility they have found a new and marvellous impulsion; at the flames of that ecstasy, which seemed to them like night, they have, in fact, lighted their torches. Winter has passed—for it was winter for them, though a rich seed-time; now the spring returns.

Held firmly in the embrace of a Presence, they could not, just now, reflect, understand, reason, feel, act, talk, or write. Now, what a transformation for the mystic, sorrowful, indeed, but also joyful: sorrowful, because of his resuscitated faculties, not one will restore to him what he has lost, that direct contact with God; joyful, because a means is offered him of pouring through every part of his being, intelligence, heart, and the rest, of transposing into his normal life something of what he has received at the centre of his soul—the joy of being able to occupy himself entirely with God; of consecrating to him his thoughts, his feelings, and his energies; of knowing him and making him known; of enjoying him and of making others enjoy him. Vocal prayer, the meditation which he has had to abandon, come back to him; the sacrifices, which only the day before were too much for him, now do not suffice to stanch his thirst for suffer-

ing; as for good works, he reanimates the old or creates new ones; speaking, writing, a stammering and a tedious labour hitherto, have become easy; words and images come easily; his difficulty is to dam the torrent. “ I was dictating the first volume of a book,” says the ecstatic Père Surin, “ and my spirit grew more and more dilated . . . feeling one day a great heat of desire to produce my thoughts, and suffering from the delay of my secretary, I impetuously took up the pen myself.” What need to say more? Literary history, history *tout court*, gives a striking testimony to the prodigious activities—devotional, intellectual, social, poetical—which follow these ineffable experiences.

These very simple observations, furnished by the witness of the mystics themselves, contain, it seems to me, the premisses of the solution we are seeking. It is quite obvious that if, normally speaking, the obscurities of mystical experience are followed by intellectual or affective lights, the former must in some way be the origin of the latter. Here is no purely accidental coincidence, but the effect of a direct and positive influence. What kind of influence is what we still have to examine.

There is certainly no question of an infusion of intellectual light. At the point of his career at which we are criticising him, the contemplative resembles in no way the pupil who, when the class is over, rereads and puts his notes in order, in the attempt to relive in memory the teaching of his master. For

the teaching of the master is clearer than the notes of the pupil in the case of our mystic; on the other hand, the speculations which succeed his ecstasy are much richer and more intelligible than the ecstasy itself. Do not let us either, and for the same reason, imagine the case of a friend, who consoles himself for his friend's absence in going over the conversation which he has recently had with him. Here, class or conversation only begin when the master or the friend are no longer there. A fallacious comparison, however, like all those at our disposal. God is always there, but he does not make himself any longer felt.

God then allowed himself to be felt. He did not speak, but, as we have dared to say, he did more and better than speak, since he gave himself in reality. Press the consequences of such a favour, and you will no longer be astonished at the splendid reactions which it produces. Where did this direct contact between God and the mystics occur? At the centre of the soul, they reply. But no matter how far the centre of the soul is placed from the surface zone, where our faculties are in movement, it is always our soul that is the living source of all our activities. We only act and think by union with this centre. Whatever gives it a profound shock reverberates more or less through our whole being, and also stimulates our intelligence and our senses. The unity of the human being will have it so. Suppose that, *per impossibile*, the mystic immediately after the visit of God should busy himself with some profane em-

ployment—say, the completion of a work of art. The immense joy which he has just been experiencing will necessarily communicate itself to that zone of his being where beautiful thoughts are conceived; will render his thought more agile, his imagination more fecund, his rhythms more harmonious, his will more tenacious. What, then, will it be if, instead of this less august object, he remains concentrated on the same object which occupied him recently, and which he can now seize in another fashion, although he no longer possesses it? Add to this that most of the time, if not always, the faculties of the mystic, more or less suspended and bound by ecstasy, nevertheless continue to agitate themselves as well as they can, and often more than they ought.¹ The faculties also would wish to unite themselves to this present God and possess him. A chimerical desire, and one which has to be repressed. But their inaction is not inertia. This apparent death to which they actively submit stimulates in them impatient forces which will burst forth magnificently as soon as the painful restraint is over.

Thus ecstasy is not light, but the generator of light, and the dim ray left by the mystic union in the centre of the soul lights up the circumference. What is this dim ray? It is the indefinable half-remembrance of a passed experience. A little thing, you say?

¹ The mystic intuition is seldom mere immediacy; it is seldom unaccompanied by some degree of “knowledge about” (Pratt, *op. cit.*, p. 405).

Yes, no doubt, if you consider the dogmatic content of this remembrance; no, if you observe the invincible certitude that survives it. The soul knows, and can in no way doubt that God himself was there and that she has possessed him. Let me quote once more the supremely important testimony of St Teresa: "How can it be that the soul has seen and heard that she has been in God and God in her, since during this union she neither sees nor hears? . . . She knows it not by a vision, but by an enduring certitude which only God can give her." The dim light of this assurance lights up all the soul knew before her ecstasy. *Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui*. The intellectual and moral seeds menaced by doubt and by the thousand weaknesses of heart and mind are suddenly vivified, and all our forces are strengthened tenfold. What lately we believed, firmly perhaps, but in a cowardly, miserable, depressed way, now shines, becomes realised, and dazzles us. What is simpler? Every beloved presence produces more or less similar effects. After a direct experience of this or that previously only known in books, after a conversation with the hero whom we had not seen before, after a friend's visit, nothing is changed and everything is changed; nothing has been learnt, and everything is known. Did the tocsin of mobilisation add a single new note to our idea of the Fatherland? And yet is it not true that at that moment France was revealed to us? It is not the obscure clarity of this experience that enables the mystic to remember the little he can of these extra-

ordinary states, the interior movements which they provoke, and the struggles which they involve. If, on one hand, mystic knowledge is effected without the intermediary of our common faculties, and if, on the other hand, as is evident, the activity of memory remains bound to that of those faculties, the mystic, once his experience is over, can only find in his memories of ecstasy that which, properly speaking, was not itself ecstasy. In other words, ecstasy is not, and never can be matter for literature. Such matter, however, exists, but where seek it if not in the brilliant twilight, in the halo of mystical experience? It is, in fact, very far from true that this mystical knowledge, beyond the senses and beyond the intellect, and consequently rejecting the concourse of our powers, completely immobilises those powers in a deep sleep. While the centre of the soul abandons itself to the divine presence, the other zones of our consciousness, the vital atmosphere of which is naturally much rarefied, continue to furnish an opportunity for exercise to the faculties which belong to them. Images pass and repass, other impressions of the senses sketch themselves out, acts of intelligence are produced, desires are moved.

The splendid activity which opens its petals in the centre of the soul is exacting (it has the right to be, for it is the best part of us), and would fain absorb all the sap of our being, but, as a rule, only succeeds very imperfectly in doing so. The various names applied by contemplatives to the stages of mystical

union correspond to the progressive success of this effort of concentration—the nights, quietude, full union, perfect ecstasy, spiritual marriage. Corresponding to this work of absorption, on the surface and in the intermediary zones of the soul, a whole *ensemble* of movements is going on, now directed or trying to direct themselves towards, and now resisting this higher activity; in the will, which is nearer to the centre, there is a passion to grasp in its familiar fashion this object which in truth it grasps already in the dark; the intelligence is on the boil with curiosity and disquiet; the senses, the vital fluid of which is greatly impoverished, suffer by turns from depression and an excitement which is anguish; everywhere a chaos of impulses, suddenly breaking down; calls and refusals; sufficient light to understand that one should resign oneself to the superior activity; too much agitation, hope, and fear for one to be able to obey, without a sort of martyrdom, this order of sacrifice, of absolute silence. And all these are, properly speaking, human acts. There will be no lack of memories or of literary matter to the mystic when he comes back to himself. To the poet still less, and this leads up to the definition of the really original element in poetic experience.

CHAPTER XV

THE MIRACLE OF POETRY

I HAVE said it twenty times: the possession of an *Anima*, and the consequent capacity for this concrete, real, unitive knowledge which I have tried to describe, is not the exclusive privilege of the poet and the mystic. The most prosaic of men, the least religious, and the most intellectually conceited has his *Anima*, as much as St John of the Cross and Virgil, and it is impossible to imagine any kind of rational knowledge in which the activity of *Anima* does not intervene or insinuate itself. It is the intensity of these activities of the deeper soul in poet and mystic that distinguish them from the run of men. From the point of view of psychological mechanism, at which we still remain, it is merely a question of more or less. At the highest stage come the mystical states, properly so called; then the higher poetical states; then the lower poetical states, meaning by them the experience of the thousands of poets who do not arrive at expression, and of the thousands of readers who are not content only to "understand" the poets; then the "real" knowledge, at the level of everybody, in which the apprehension of the real is so weak and evanescent that nothing betrays the passage of the current. It

is in this more or less vivid apprehension of the real that these diverse states resemble each other; it remains to study the particular, specifically distinct quality presented by this apprehension in the case of poetic experience.

Two characteristics, or, rather, two aspects of one and the same peculiarity: first, an invincible need of translating, of communicating externally, the poetic experiences, followed in the higher states by a certain gift which permits the poet, not to translate—for all real knowledge is by definition untranslatable—but to communicate to us, to cause to pass into us his experience. It may be said, in a word, the specific quality of poetic experience is to be communicable. But does not the mystic, it may be thought, feel this irresistible need to talk or to write as much as the poet? Père Surin, for instance, M. Olier, and many others. . . . *Calamus scribae velociter scribentis*. Yes, certainly, and they give way too much to this impulse, but it is not the result of the mystical experience, which tends of itself rather to repress and stifle it.

Theology, writes on this subject one of the spiritual masters of the seventeenth century, Père Guilleré, tells us that certain graces are not given to the soul for its own sake, but for that of others.

The poetic gift has that in common with these graces: one is not a supreme poet for oneself, but for the public; the poetic gift corresponds in the natural order to what the prophetic gift stands for in the supernatural.

But I say also that others are only given to the soul for herself alone. I suppose you have read in Scripture that it is well to keep the secret of the king; is there any other king of consciences but the Holy Spirit, who reigns and conducts his secret operations there. What is the secret but these precious communications, which must not pass further than the divine Spouse and the soul; so much so, that to reveal them to anyone but a director . . . is to violate the fidelity of the secret ?

By that he intends to put directors on their guard against a real abuse. In point of fact, many of them, greatly impressed and, as it were, dazed by the confidences of their penitents, bid them write their interior history. A dangerous counsel, deplorable even, in the majority of cases. What a service would have been done to the Church by the director who should have condemned Mme. Guyon to more silence ! It is not the normal function of the mystic in the Church to teach. The lights they receive in contemplation not only do not impose on them the duty of consecrating themselves to that task, but—and this is the important point—they do not themselves give them the means of doing so. For observe, there are, no doubt, incomparable doctors among the mystics, but it is not their mystical grace that makes them doctors, or that confers their mission on them. There is nothing to prevent a great contemplative from being at the same time a great theologian or a great philosopher, just as there is nothing to prevent a Shelley or a Proust from being an æsthetician of the first rank.

But when such doctors as Surin or John of the Cross write didactically on mystical matters, they are not proposing in any way to communicate to us their experience, to raise us by their instructions to the mystical state. They know too well that no human teaching can produce that result. They address themselves directly to the reason of the reader, as Shelley does in the *Defence of Poetry*. The poet, on the contrary, has for his purpose as such to provoke in us an experience more or less similar to his own poetical experience, to raise us with him to the poetic state. And just as there are doctors among the mystics, so there are poets in the full and natural sense of the word. For instance, St Teresa, St John of the Cross, St Francis of Sales. As poets they communicate to us something of their poetical, not of their mystical experience—that they cannot do. The ones I have named shine with the triple aureole of doctor, poet, and contemplative. As doctors they give our intelligence the fruit of their reflections, of their analyses; as poets they communicate each his own particular experience; but as contemplatives they have nothing to teach or tell us; they keep the secret of the king to themselves. By humility? No doubt, but chiefly because they have no means of transmission.

The poet is necessarily also a doctor. As such, indeed, his aureole is too often made of gilt paper. But still, he is always saying something, he is nearly always teaching something; he expresses ideas, he paints pictures, he handles sentiments or sensations;

in short, all the didactic baggage which everyone who makes use of words carries on his shoulder. But it is not his personal poetic experience, personal poetic gift that enables him to make this doctrinal communication rich or poor, as it may happen to be. All that is in itself nothing but eloquence. The proof is that all that the poet teaches us or says in his own language can be translated exactly into another, while the *poetical* element in a poem remains untranslatable. *Athalie* turned into English is nothing but a piece of eloquence, no longer *Athalie*, and if the translator should happen to be a poet himself, appropriating Racine's text, as Racine himself appropriated the text of the Bible, should draw from the same subject a new poem, this poem as such will have nothing in common with *Athalie*.

Untranslatable, but not incommunicable; indeed, quite the contrary. If we do not accept this fact, we must admit that poetry is as much a myth as the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life. Either it can be communicated or it is nothing. Through those very same words which, taken in themselves—that is, as representative signs of ideas, as a means of intellectual communication—belong exclusively to the art of teaching or eloquence, the *Anima* of the poet penetrates to the *Anima* of the reader up to the central zone, the access of which is forbidden to all didacticisms, however eloquent; the poet's *Anima* stimulates this deeper self of the reader, elevates it, and associates it with the poet's own experience. It is by the gift

of rendering words capable of this marvellous transmission that the poet is distinguished from the mystic, the orator and the run of men.

By it also is the true poet distinguished from those who find in reading him a truly poetic pleasure. This pleasure, this I know not what, which the poet causes to pass into us, is no doubt poetry, but in a diluted form. There are some, said George Eliot, who have the heart, but not the voice of the poet. To this innumerable family belong, first of all, so many of the truly inspired who will never arrive at self-expression; after them all those who read poetically the poets. Both these classes have been refused the true poetic gift. The poet, in the strict sense of the word, is a voice—*os magna sonaturum*—or he is not. As long as the words he uses are only intellectual signs, there may be latent or diffused poetry, potential poetry; there is no real poetry.

This necessary connection between the higher poetic states and the discovery—laborious or not, it does not matter, but infallible—of the proper formulas to communicate to the reader a presentiment, a foretaste, something, in fine, of those higher states; these words of every man which, traced by another pen, would present ideas or images, but nothing poetic, suddenly transmuted by one knows not what magic, and become capable of stimulating poetic vibrations, this is the whole miracle of poetry.

It is also the infinitely complex problem on which modern æsthetic tends more and more to concentrate.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CATHARSIS

IN his memorable essay, *De la tragédie ancienne et moderne*—one of the first masterpieces of French criticism (1672)—Saint-Evremond reproaches the Athenian drama with having been a “pitiable school of commiseration, a school of terror and compassion, in which men learnt to fear all perils and make themselves miserable over all misfortunes.” After which, rising to those vast ideologies which both enchant and irritate fine minds, he continues: “It will be difficult to persuade me that a soul accustomed to frighten itself over the troubles of others can be in a good state of mind to meet her own troubles.” He forgets nothing but the gospel—*misereor super turbam*—but, as has been already pointed out sufficiently, the *péché mignon* of classical æsthetics was to keep poetry and faith in watertight compartments. “Perhaps this was the reason why the Athenians became so susceptible to impressions of fear, and why this spirit of terror, so artistically inspired in the theatre, became only too natural in the army.” Briefly, Sophocles was a professor of cowardice, and consequently responsible for the Athenian decadence; instead of touching his compatriots to compassion for

the misfortunes of Œdipus, he should only have put before their eyes "examples of valour and firmness." The Roman inhumanity and the combats of gladiators would have been better.

Aristotle was well aware of the harm that this might do to the Athenians; but he thought that he brought sufficient remedy by establishing the existence of a certain *purgation*, which no one up to the present has understood, and which, in my judgement, he did not clearly understand himself. For what can be more absurd than to make a science which will certainly give you an illness in order to establish another which works uncertainly for your healing? What more ridiculous than to trouble a soul in order afterwards to calm it by the reflections which one suggests to him on the shameful state to which he has been reduced?

Among every thousand persons who assist at a drama there would, perhaps, be six philosophers capable of a return to tranquillity through these wise and useful meditations; but the multitude will not make these reflections, and one can feel pretty certain that the habit of seeing this kind of thing on the stage will help to create one of these unfortunate motions in the spectators.

In my judgement, this is nothing but a long paralogism, but such an intelligent one that I have preferred to quote it to many others in which unreason wears a less plausible mask. I might as well have taken Bossuet's *Maximes sur la Comédie*, but everyone remembers them. If we reflect a little we shall see that they do nothing but develop with an incomparable eloquence these two lines of Saint-Evremond: "The

habit of seeing this kind of thing on the stage will help to create one of these unfortunate motions in the spectator," and several others equally dangerous, such as love.

All that, we say, is very intelligent and perfectly just if the purgation, the Catharsis of Aristotle, is to be understood in the manner of Saint-Evremond, and, with him, of innumerable commentators, and Racine himself. In point of fact, they have misunderstood, though very excusably, since the chapter in which the Stagirite promised to define his Catharsis was never written, or has been lost—a forever lamentable catastrophe, the result of which has been to distort for long centuries the very orientation of æsthetics, and to make Aristotle pass for a man who did not always understand himself.

We have just heard the blasphemy of Saint-Evremond; here are some less brutal versions of it from other pens. "I have never understood the purgation of the passions by means of the passions themselves," confesses Fontenelle, "so I will say nothing. If a man is purged in that way, so much the better; even so I cannot see how it can be a good thing to be cured of pity." Voltaire is of exactly the same opinion: "I do not know what this medicine is for the purgation of the passions; I do not understand how fear and pity purge according to Aristotle."¹ For my part, I think

¹ Folkierski, *op. cit.*, p. 276. Elsewhere, as we shall see, Voltaire sides completely with the explanation of the moralists.

the contrary, and I believe that on that day, as on all the days of his life, Aristotle understood perfectly what he meant, but that he only half realised his magnificent intuition or the presentiments which were guiding his pen. He did not hold, and would have dismissed with as much vivacity as Saint-Evremond, the absurdities attributed to him; but in order thoroughly to explain his own doctrine he would have necessarily required a psychology of which he had no idea. In point of fact, the Catharsis is nothing else than what the mystics call the passage from meditation to contemplation, what we have called the substitution of the activities of *Anima* for those of *Animus*; briefly, the passage from rational to real and poetic knowledge. If Aristotle had fully understood himself, he would not have reserved to tragedy alone the purifying, simplifying, and enriching action of the Catharsis. All poetic experience is Catharsis. All the poetry in any poem is equally Catharsis. But to divine in those days mysteries which, thanks to mystical literature, seem to us today almost luminous, was a stroke of genius.

In saying this I bring no new contribution; I am merely bringing together two objects which call for each other, which ask only to be united—our modern æsthetic and that line of Aristotle. The latter is only coherent and reasonable in the light of the former. Why has this not been observed sooner? Because in spite of ourselves—and Aristotle—the obsession of didacticism holds us fast and blinds us. Even when we deny it with our lips we still believe that the poet

is, after all, but a professor who speaks in verse. Above all, a professor of morals. For far the greater number the Catharsis is a lesson of morals, more or less disguised, insinuated, suggested rather than formulated, but still definitely a lesson, a body of teaching addressed to our surface faculties, primarily to the intelligence, and through the intelligence to the will.

What I can assure, writes Racine with stupefying candour, is that I have never composed a tragedy in which virtue is more fully displayed than in this one (*Phèdre*): the slightest faults are severely punished; the mere thought of crime is looked on with as much horror as crime itself; the weaknesses of love pass in it for real weaknesses. The passions are only presented in order to *show* all the disorder of which they are the cause, and vice is everywhere painted in such colours as make its deformity known and hated. That is the proper aim which every man who writes for the public should put before himself, and that is what the first tragic poets always had in view before everything else. Their drama was a school in which virtue was taught no less than in the schools of the philosophers.

The eloquence of Bossuet was not needed to upset this card-castle; Saint-Evremont's fillip is enough. It is, moreover, a very delicate point whether Aristotle's Catharsis—which is our own—is in action in Racine's *Phèdre*. Personally, I am persuaded that it is. But certainly not by using a didactic stop; *Phèdre* is not a course of moral philosophy in action. Here, at least, Bossuet's demonstration is irrefutable. Take, as a clearer illustration, two contemporary novels:

Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* and *Jude the Obscure*. As far as moral teaching goes, I defy you to find any difference between them; the first, however, is poetically, and consequently morally, both generally and in detail, a perfect work. Even Bossuet would have hesitated to condemn it, and for my part I know few books so beneficent. The second, in spite of incontestable beauties of detail, speaking of the ensemble, is morally harmful, and from the point of view of poetry a failure. In the first, the Catharsis produces its effect; from the second it is absent. I repeat that I am speaking of the ensemble. This is said in passing to remind the reader that my supposed metaphysical subtleties have the highest value for simple literary criticism. Voltaire, with his customary cheerfulness, commits the same blunder as Racine.

His idea that tragedy was instituted in order to purge the passions has been greatly exaggerated, but if he means, as I believe, that one can tame an incestuous love after having seen the misfortune of *Phèdre*, there is no longer any difficulty.¹

No, indeed; no other difficulty but that of recognising that Aristotle understands nothing of the character or nature of poetry. It is fortunately certain that Aristotle never dreamed of confiding this directly moralising and didactic function to his Catharsis. Hear Mr. Butcher: "Aristotle's critical judgements on poetry rest on æsthetic and logical grounds; they

¹ Johanneau, *La rhétorique de Voltaire*, p. 211.

take no account of ethical aims or tendencies. He mentions Euripides some twenty times in the *Poetics*, and in the great majority of instances with censure. He points out numerous defects, such as inartistic structure, bad character-drawing, a wrong part assigned to the chorus; but not a word is there of the immoral influence of which we hear so much in Aristophanes. In his praise, as little as in his blame, does Aristotle look to the moral content of a poem. Sophocles he admires, not for the purity of his ethical teaching, or for his deep religious intuitions, but for the unity which pervades the structure of his dramas, and the closely linked sequence of parts which work up to an inevitable end.”¹ Not that he despises morals. He would have been almost as severe on that point as Bossuet, and much more so than public opinion today. But it is one thing to recognise that a work contrary to morals cannot be really poetic, and another to entrust the poet with a moralising mission. To purge us of our vices and form us to virtue is the function of the philosopher. It was not necessary to invent a new metaphor to indicate the psychological mechanism which is set to work by the exercise of professorial functions; by the appeal to the will and intelligence through the intermediary of fine phrases. Aristotle is very certainly here concerned with an activity *sui generis* hitherto uncatalogued by science, with a properly æsthetic faculty; he is analysing the poetic

¹ S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (Macmillan and Co., 1895).

experience of the spectator at a tragedy, and the purgative effect which he attributes to the Catharsis is indistinguishable from poetic pleasure itself. It is a pleasure like others, but which has the peculiar quality of "purging" us. Aristotle has borrowed this word from the lexicon of medicine. Now one may certainly say that the moralist resembles the physician. He heals us, but in his own way, which has nothing specifically therapeutic about it. He demands a very active collaboration on our part. A lesson in morals, however successful it be, does not moralise us itself by its own proper action; it does not bring about the sudden inevitable more or less explosive result of a perfect remedy. The Catharsis, on the other hand, purges us mechanically—one may say drastically—whatever may be the peccant humours (pity, fear . . .) from which it delivers us. No personal effort is demanded; we have but to appropriate the benefit it brings, as the patient accepts an injection or swallows a pill. If a man capable of reading a book poetically reads Æschylus or Sophocles, he will not escape the Catharsis; before he meditates on these beautiful verses, before he has deduced any lesson whatever from them, he is entirely "purged." The pathetic praise of virtue, impressive pictures of vice and its accompanying miseries, good advice and recipes of conduct—how roundabout is the ministry of the moralist. The doctor goes straight to the point; a stroke of the lancet, a pill, we are cured.

The other explanations that have been attempted up

to now of the Catharsis—those, at least, which I know—for the most part avoid the blunder which we have just exorcised—namely, that the Catharsis is an explicit or implicit lesson in morals, but, apart from that, leave us in the vague and the equivocal. Why be surprised at this? As long as critics, in order to give an acceptable meaning to the doctrine of Aristotle, do not have recourse with us to the psychology of the mystics, they are up against an insoluble difficulty, the very difficulty which Fontenelle pointed out with his habitual penetration: “What is the good of being cured of pity?” In more general terms, these peccant humours of which the Catharsis purges us, these diverse passions, fear as much as pity, love as much as fear, where lies their harm? What harm can it do us to compassionate the misfortunes of others, to tremble before the strokes of divine justice, to observe complacently the transports of an honourable love? But, it will be said, is there not also such a thing as an effeminate pity, a demoralising fear, a dishonourable love? No doubt, but these distinctions are relevant only to moral science. Poetic activity attacks, in its specific exercise, all passions, whatever they may be, attacks passion as passion. We are dealing here, as we have said, with a blind and in a certain sense a mechanical remedy: a purgation, a bleeding, a blister. The Catharsis purges us of all pity, of all fear, of all love. Truly, an absurd remedy, and often worse than the disease. Fontenelle was quite right.

If, *per impossibile*, we escape this *impasse*, we at once

fall under the claw of Bossuet. Suppose that the Catharsis encourages, or, at least, leaves alone, honourable passions, and that it only tends to weaken and paralyse evil passions. What will be, according to Aristotle, its method of attaining this result? The method of Pasteur, reply modern commentators; by inoculating us with infinitesimal doses of the very passion from which it wishes to cure us. Hermione, for instance; we no longer say today that the spectacle of her fury invites us to reflect on the dangers of a too lively passion. That would be didacticism; and the poet, as such, does not teach. But we say that such a spectacle, infecting us with the microbe of tragic loves, renders us insensibly immune to that danger. Similarly, *Phèdre* vaccinates us against incest. Each representation of the drama lights in our hearts a tiny incestuous fever, as the result of which, if the temptation should occur to us of making love to our mother-in-law, we should resist without difficulty. So foolish a doctrine that one doubts if it can have been seriously realised by those who teach it. It puts all the trumps in Bossuet's hand. Even at the stage of a microbe incest is an evil. If the Catharsis acts directly on our passionate life, we must say with Rostand:

Et quand Phèdre paraît nous sommes tous incestes.

But if, contrariwise, we hold that the Catharsis acts primarily on the deeper self, beyond the surface zone where the passions exercise their power, beneficent or

terrible by turn, all difficulties disappear. The disease of which the Catharsis should purge us is no longer of the moral, but simply of the psychological order. Passion is a peccant humour simply because it tends by its very nature to obstruct the activity of the deeper soul, the centre and the source of all poetic activity. From the æsthetic point of view, what there is morbid about passion is not this or that particular excess, it is passion itself; a metaphysical infirmity, so to speak, totally unmodified by the strictest obedience of the poet to the laws of morality. When Vincent de Paul gives way to movements of pity, he places himself by that very fact in the impossibility of at the same time enjoying the quite different experiences of the poetic state. Imagine, on the other hand, that at the moment when his keenly excited pity makes him pursue his works of charity a poetic inspiration seizes him, and he gives way to it; the Catharsis will necessarily automatically "purge" him of his pity, which will be suspended as long as his poetical experience lasts. Now from a moral point of view is this purgation, this suspension of an all-holy passion, a good or an evil? Neither the one nor the other; it is a psychological necessity. One may refuse to give way to poetical inspiration; it may sometimes be one's duty to do so.

Honte à qui peut chanter pendant que Rome brûle.

But if one accepts it, the Catharsis and all its natural effects must be accepted too. The grain cannot be in

the oven and between the millstones at the same moment, if I may so express myself. If *Anima* is dilated and expands, *Animus* at once begins to languish. The poet, says Amiel,

assists at the suffering which he endures, but he envelops it as the tranquil heaven surrounds a storm. Poetry is a deliverance because it is a liberty.

Liberty of the deeper *Me*, delivered from the *I*.

Far from being an emotion, poetry is the mirror of an emotion; it is outside and above emotion, calm and serene. In order to sing one's sorrows, one must be already, if not cured, at all events convalescent. Song is a symptom of equilibrium; it sings victory over trouble, it is the sign of the return of strength. The poet is for his own little life what God is for the world. He enters it through his sensibility, but he dominates by essence. His nature is contemplative, and activity [rational or passional] is but his inferior mode of being.¹

Baudelaire thinks equally that "enthusiasm"—this (poetic) "stimulation" of the deeper soul—is completely independent of passion, which is the intoxication of the heart; of truth, which is the food of reason. For passion is . . . too natural [too involved in the miseries of *Animus*] not to introduce a distressing note, a discord in the domain of pure beauty; too familiar and too violent not to scandalise the pure desires, the melancholies, and the noble despairs which inhabit the supernatural regions of poetry.²

¹ *Amiel*, ii, pp. 207, 208.

² Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, vi, pp. 20-21.

“ We must not confuse,” he says again, “ the sensibility of the imagination with that of the heart.”¹ This “ sensibility of the imagination ” is the result of the activity of the Catharsis which stimulates it, and by doing so “ purges ” us, and delivers us from the excitements—from a moral point of view good or evil, it does not matter—which are provoked by the sensibility of the heart. This, at least, is the case, in my judgement, with the dramas of Racine; the magic of the poet transports us, fixes us for a few too short instants in a region of the soul which is impermeable to the rages of love, the seductions of incest, or the terrors of fear. It is true that Aristotle does not say all this in his two lines on the Catharsis—one in the *Politics*, the other in the *Poetics*; but if these two lines mean anything at all, they are big, so to speak, with no other meaning than the one we give them.

It is true that a sort of fatality hangs over the interpretation of these enigmatic texts. The key of the enigma was within the reach of all hands; the light could be seen by all eyes, for it was not placed under a bushel, but in a lighthouse, in the writings of Plotinus. Such was the grievous price which had to be paid for the contempt so long professed for mystical matters; all the pages in Greek—the works of Hippocrates, for example—in which the Catharsis is expressly named, all except the *Enneads*.² Is it not very remarkable

¹ *Variétés critiques* (Crès), ii, p. 165.

² I would remind the reader that I have but a summary erudition. I merely mean to say that, as far as I can re-

that this mysterious expression, which properly belongs to medicine—ancient and modern, *postea purgare*—should have been transferred as a luminous metaphor by two such geniuses as Aristotle and Plotinus into the languages respectively of æsthetic theory and of mysticism? Possibly a mere coincidence, a purely verbal likeness between the Catharsis of Plotinus and that of Aristotle, but perhaps, also, a ray of light for us, the sign of some deep connection between the two. It will not take us long to find out. Let us, then, open Plotinus, or, rather, since he is hard to understand, let us ask a professional philosopher for a definition of the Plotinian Catharsis; in the doctrine of Plotinus, writes M. Souilhé, “the means by which the soul will reach the supreme object of its desire will be to return into itself and discover by recollection the interior god of which it bears the trace.” He who has thus learned to know himself will know at the same time whence he comes. “He will return to his source, his centre, and his end, and in this intimate sanctuary

member, the Plotinian Catharsis is not mentioned by those commentators whom I have been able to consult on the Aristotelian Catharsis. It seems unlikely that no one up to the present should have thought of so easy and *obvious* a comparison. It may be that the comparison has been made only to be at once dismissed as a false scent; I mean in order to conclude that under the same name Aristotle and Plotinus were designating essentially different things. Thus, Butcher sees a difference, which, however, escapes me entirely, between the tragical and musical Catharsis, or the religious. Cf. Butcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-231.

he will find himself one with his Good. But every being which is not THE ONE is dispersed in space and time. He must therefore concentrate and unify himself so as to possess the God who is pure simplicity. He must suppress this obstacle and redeem himself from multiplicity and dispersion. From this follows the necessity for purification. The doctrine of the *κάθαρσις* is very important in the history of Christian asceticism and mysticism. The theorists have, no doubt, utilised the rich analyses furnished by the neo-Platonicians. But these in their turn were not the inventors. Methods of purification were in use in the mysteries of Eleusis or in the circles of Orphism; they consisted in savage customs, the object of which was to save the soul from an indefinite cycle of rebirths. Very probably the Pythagoricians transposed the concept from the sphere of its religious origin into that of philosophical speculation."

Aristotle introduced the same concept into æsthetic speculation, having first deprived it of all religious connotation. We now restore it to its origins in mysticism. The Pythagoricians, continues M. Souilhé, thought that the soul, which was the prisoner of the body, "would seek for liberty, not through suicide, but every means which might make her forget her importunate jailer, such as art, in particular music, by science . . .; such would be the 'purifications.' Plato thought the same. The *Phaedo* proves it. . . . We find in the *Sophist* a very curious passage in which the philosopher, making use . . . of medical com-

parisons, shows the necessity for the soul of a *κάθαρσις*, an operation which consists in the refutation, in the expulsion of those phantoms of which the *Theaetetus* speaks . . . in a word, in the dialectic which raises the intelligence above the sensible world, and places it directly before the truth. The eye of the soul must be made clear."

The eye of *Animus* or the eye of *Anima*? We are left in doubt on the subject. We know, too, that Plato is afraid of *Anima*, considers every activity not directly depending on *Animus* to be humiliating for man. Sound doctrine is still in the cradle, babbling incoherently, until the day when Christian mysticism will definitely fix the lines. "The practice of virtues . . . the study of sciences . . . are not an end in themselves, but a means of purification of this interior gaze. Plotinus, reviving the metaphor of the eye of the soul, resumes the analyses of the Platonicians, combines them with the very particular applications made by Aristotle of the *κάθαρσις*, to the purifying virtue of music and tragedy. . . ."

We take up this work of synthesis in our turn where Plotinus left it, and we complete it, thanks to the new light thrown on it by mystical literature. Briefly, "the Plotinian *κάθαρσις* consists primarily in no longer acting on the information of the senses, then through a more advanced purification, no longer acting with the power of the soul—that is, with the power of reasoning [*Animus*]. Finally, to live only by means of that which, 'though in the soul, is not the soul'

[*Anima*],¹ or by what is directly capable of contact with THE ONE, to engulf oneself, to lose oneself in him to the point of self-identification with him. [An identification which no orthodox mystic ever dreamed of.] Union with God, just that is the term and the recompense of the Catharsis. This unifying contemplation takes place when the soul has closed her doors on everything that takes her out of herself, when she has made a silence in her senses, her faculties, her reasoning intelligence itself . . . when, in a word, she thinks by the *νοῦς καθαρός*, with the fine point of the spirit. . . . It is granted to this very pure state of mind, towards which we elevate ourselves by our individual effort,² by disengaging ourselves from the *effusio ad exteriora*. When that point is reached, God gives himself."³

I have already insinuated, I will now say expressly, that God does not give himself immediately to the poet. Whence comes the fundamental difference between the poetic and mystical experience. But whatever be the reality to which our deeper soul is united, it is always by the Catharsis that this union is produced; or, rather, this union is the Catharsis itself, whether mystical or poetical, a simplifying inspiration,

¹ An impossible life, as we have several times repeated. Surer philosophers than Plotinus, the mystics do not demand the total purgation of *Animus*. They do not confuse *Animus* and *Anima*.

² No. Like mystical grace, poetic grace is a gift for which no effort can be substituted.

³ *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, April, 1922, p. 188.

the liberation of *Anima*, and the provisional suppression of *Animus*. "A poem," said Baudelaire, "only deserves its title in so far as it excites and ravishes the soul, and the positive [and poetic] value of a poem is in exact proportion to the degree of this excitement, to the completeness of this ravishment of the soul."¹

What metaphor is used is, after all, unimportant, but manifestly the Plotinian explanation of the Catharsis is imposed on us by the experience of the poets.² The numerous texts which I have already quoted can mean nothing else. Here are two more which I feel I cannot keep to myself :

Nature and, above all, the forest have always had the power to pacify and raise my soul. In my joyous admiration for all the beauty which attracted me, and which I tried to render in forms and colour,

It is a painter who is speaking, Dom Willibrord Verkade, in the delightful book in which he relates his conversion :

¹ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, vi, p. 17.

² This explanation of the Catharsis has been, in a sort of way, in the air for a very long time. I only catch it on the wing. Compare all that Schopenhauer says on musical incantation. Compare also the exquisite and profound brochure of Maurice Blondel: *La psychologie dramatique du mystère de la Passion à Oberammergau* (Paris, 1910). You will see there how the art of drama—and this is equally true of all the arts—in a certain manner eternalises us, decentralises us, purifies us from the illusions of time and space, as of the illusions of egoism, the anxieties of the *I*, conferring on us a sort of universality and perennity.

I felt myself becoming another man. The tempest of my sensations calmed down . . . and the purity of what surrounded me made my better self, that timid beast, come out of his lair: the bold roebuck of a noble pride, the unicorn of innocence, the timid antelope of modesty, the pigeon of deep feelings, the turtle-dove of pure thoughts. . . . Often, too, I saw in dreams a very pure young girl whom I had caught sight of somewhere. This vision equally *purified* my soul.¹

Catharsis, it is impossible to avoid the word. And Tommy Fallot:

Everything that I saw, everything that I heard, enveloped me and gradually invaded the most secret retreats of my being. *I was delivered* from the incoherences of daily life, of which the discords blended into a superior harmony, a great calm made itself felt, and my soul, escaping from the vulgarities of this life, winged its way towards the serene regions of profound peace and triumphant light.²

Need I add that the æsthetic of Proust all comes back to this one point? All the pages on the *Sonate de Vinteuil* are nothing but a long and perfect description of the Catharsis.

¹ *Le Tourment de Dieu*, by Dom Willibrord Verkade, O.S.B., *Etapas d'un moine peintre* . . . preface by Maurice Denis (Paris, Rouart), pp. 43, 44. A very beneficent book, a Catharsis in 300 pages.

² Quoted by M. Robert Will in his interesting *brochure*, *Le culte mystique* (Strasbourg, 1924)

CHAPTER XVII

THE CATHARSIS AND THE MAGIC OF VERSE

DO not let us be afraid of repeating ourselves; more or less similar experiences are familiar to many people who could only be called poets in the large sense of the word.¹ The Catharsis which distinguishes the poet from others, the Catharsis which is poetry itself, has this special quality: that it first wishes to communicate itself, in fact, by the quasi-magical intermediary of words. Inspiration, more or less common to all of us, only becomes specifically poetic when it dictates to the inspired one certain expressions, without which, although he could no doubt tell us in prose that he was inspired, he would not be able to make his inspiration pass into us.

¹ The Catharsis, liberated, so to speak, by the spectacle of nature, is well known, although it is not often called by that name. The Catharsis, which sometimes recompenses isolated acts or habits of virtue, is less remarked, and this is very unfortunate. I mean the sentiment—not the pharisaic feeling; if *Anima* wished to be a pharisee, she could not—of duty fulfilled, of certain joys of the conscience; a Catharsis which may be called moral, but which, nevertheless, taken in itself, has no more to do with the moral order than any other “purgation” or simplification. No asceticism will procure it directly; it does not depend on our efforts.

That is, as I have said often enough, the true miracle of poetry, but it is also a fact which only those to whom poetic pleasure is inaccessible will call in doubt. If the Catharsis is there the current passes, infallibly transmitted by the poet's words to *Anima*, ready to welcome it; if the current does not pass, then there is no true poetic Catharsis. The untranslatable part of a poem is the Catharsis. It is not, indeed, necessary that the Catharsis should dictate, one after another, all the verses of a poem; it is sufficient if here and there this verbal magic should renew its wonders. When Theseus asks so politely:

Et ce feu dans Trésène à donc recommencé ? . . .

Not the slightest Catharsis! The same thing is true of almost all the transitional verses of the *Æneid*, all the *Tunc pater Æneas*. This is the drawback of long poems; it is also the proof that everything in a poem is not poetry. A perfect incantation like the *Di quibus imperium est* of the sixth canto, or like "Ariana, my sister . . ." prolongs its cathartic effect through the *longueurs*, often prosaic enough, of a narrative or of a scene.

It must also be noted that when the Catharsis has opened the gates of the deeper soul, *Animus* has always a certain amount of trouble in closing them. In the *Georgics* he hardly ever has time. Be invincibly suspicious of those critics—and they are many—who teach that the real poetry of the *Georgics* should be sought in the *Episodes*:

Et quidam seros hiberni ad luminis ignes
 Pervigilat, ferroque faces inspicat acuto.
 Interea, longum cantu solata laborem,
 Arguto conjux percurrit pectine telas. . . .

That is where Dante and Shakespeare remain without rivals. There is the same non-interruption, or almost, of the current in Keats. In the *Ode to a Nightingale* the Catharsis not only acts with a marvellous intensity, but also arrives at a passing self-consciousness, and defines itself in the best way possible. After the divine evocation of Ruth:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by Emperor and clown . . .
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

That is so perfect that one follows the triumphant and almost visible movement of the current—*when sick for home, she stood*—after this invocation he finishes the strophe with the word *forlorn*; from this word the incantation leaps on, if I may say so:

Forlorn ! 'The very word is like a bell
 'To call me back from thee to my soul's self !
 Adieu.

Forlorn, naturally untranslatable, since it contains three or four charges of electric current : "*Forlorn !* all by itself this word is like a bell, the music of which calls me from thee to return into my deeper self."

There is nothing more capricious, less foreseeable, than the verbal exigencies of the Catharsis; it loves

“ a happy choice of harmonious words,” but it happens sometimes—and more often than one may think—that it prefers a fairly elementary orchestra: a flute, a gong, even a rattle; such and such an alliteration enchants it, while another stops it short; turn by turn it will adore and detest archaisms, diminutives, and monosyllables. Caprice is not the right word; each of these choices corresponds to some necessity of which savants, although they cannot divine it, may up to a certain point assure themselves. The Catharsis has its laws, like all the forces of the soul, but no rules, and the least unknown of its laws is the instinct that obliges it to repeat the same sounds.

A strange thing; a more or less similar law seems to preside over certain manifestations of the mystical life.

Look at this good old woman, writes Père Maréchal, telling her beads on a winter evening in the chimney corner.

Here we are back at the *Georgics* : *Interea longum cantu. . . .*

During the day her attention was dispersed over the small cares of her household, and confined to the limits of a modest village horizon. But see how now, her duties done, she sits down on her shaky chair, draws out her rosary, and after making a great sign of the Cross, begins to mutter Hail Marys one after another in a slow rhythm. The monotony of these repetitions clothes the poor old woman with physical peace and recollection.

Recollection, the normal prelude of the Catharsis, and already in a certain manner itself Catharsis :

And her soul, already directed on high, almost mechanically, by her habitual gesture of drawing out the rosary, immediately opens out with increasing serenity.

Serenity follows by definition Catharsis, on unlimited perspectives, felt rather than analysed.

Anima has quarrelled with analyses which converge on God.

Distraction may, perhaps, supervene from this direction or that.

Animus, weary of this repose, loses patience and starts prowling.

But thanks to the continual and monotonous rhythm of the recitation, the affective polarisation [no, already more or less mystical] which it maintains or restores continually and gently brings her attention back [is "attention" the right word here ?] in the direction of God. What does it matter, then, if the humble *orante* does not concern herself with living over again the exact meaning of the formula she is repeating ? . . . Often she does better : she allows her soul to arise freely into a true contemplation, well worn and obscure, uncomplicated, unsystematised.

All contemplation is obscure, uncomplicated, unsystematised :

Alternating with a return of the attention to the words she is muttering, but building up in the long run, on the mechanical basis they afford, a higher, purified, personal prayer.¹

¹ Maréchal, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8.

Rhyme, alliterations, the repetition of words, refrains, produce in the reader an analogous appeasement and purification. We may remember, moreover, that in every poetical experience there is, so to speak, a double Catharsis, for there are two deliverances and two purgations. First of all, the deeper soul, relieved of the importunate activity of *Animus*, becomes dilated, aspires the Real with which union is at last possible; then *Animus* himself receives as the necessary recompense for the abnegation to which he has consented, a refreshing and redoubling of activity. Poetry, says Robert de Souza admirably, "aims at transfiguration as well as at emotion." First at transfiguration, I would add, and in consequence of this very transfiguration, of these provisional substitutions of *Anima* for *Animus*, a triumphant return of *Animus* with all his ideas, sentiments, and images. Purified, tranquillised, spiritualised by these moments of repose, the surface faculties get a fresh start; "the deep-hearted wood-pigeon, the pure-minded turtle-dove," the eagle of sublime imaginations, take to their wings.¹

¹ So we remain in the tradition. *Nil innovetur nisi quod traditum est*. It is Aristotle who placed the key of the arch of romantic æsthetic—I mean, of course, æsthetic *tout court*. Many a problem which has given rise to interminable quarrels has thus been solved with the most exquisite simplicity. As, for instance, the difference between wit and humour: wit is but the amusement of *Animus*; humour, that of *Anima*. Thus, also, is solved the problem of the relations between art and morals. Two axioms, at the same time both a con-

firmation and a criticism of the maxims of Bossuet, give it: (1) By the nature of things poetic activity cannot be a preaching activity; any kind of didacticism is as impossible to the Catharsis as the perception of perfumes to the ear; (2) but the Catharsis, while remaining independent of any immediately ethical preoccupation, and incapable of an immediate action on the free-will and the passions, good or bad, remains, nevertheless—indirectly, no doubt, but very efficaciously—a moralising force. Not only does the Catharsis never invite us to evil—that, I repeat, is not, and cannot be forbidden to it, for it is impossible for it to do so—but by the serenity with which it enfolds our surface faculties it necessarily awakes in us the desire of good, as the harp of David restored calm to the heart of Saul. A work of literature which should unchain in us our evil passions, however trifling, may be eloquent, but is not poetic—at least, in the passages which produce that effect.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POET AND THE MYSTIC

SO, in order to solve the enigma of the Aristotelian Catharsis, we have to have recourse to the psychology of the mystics. Which brings us back to our point of departure: it is not the poet who illuminates the mystery of the mystics; on the contrary, it is the mystic, and the mystic in his most sublime states, who helps us to penetrate the mystery of the poet. How should it be otherwise, since, on the one hand, poetic and mystical experience belong by their psychological mechanism to the same order of knowledge—real knowledge—not immediately conceptual, but unitive . . .; and that, on the other, mystical experience is the highest degree and the supreme development here below of all real knowledge; indeed, the most perfect kind of real knowledge, not only on account of the supernatural character which all believers attribute to it, and which assures its transcendence,¹ but, further, because it alone sets in

¹ Like every other human activity, like the work of the blacksmith or the chemist, the labours of the poet may—and should—be ordered to a supernatural end, thus becoming meritorious, in the theological sense of the word, a means of sanctification, and, in short, prayer. Poetic experience is not,

movement the whole psychological mechanism, all the springs which actuate real knowledge.

We said with Père de Grandmaison that poetic activity was a profane, natural sort of preliminary sketch of mystical activity—profane and natural, surely, we have just repeated it; but, what is more, confused, clumsy, full of holes or blanks, so that the poet in

then, necessarily entirely profane or wholly natural, but it is sufficient to give it that label that it may be, and that, in point of fact, it most often is. For one Prudentius, how many Villons ! I also believe that every poetic inspiration is in itself a gift of God, not *gratum faciens*, as "sanctifying grace," but one of those "natural graces" which, without supernaturalising us by their own force, are intended to aid us in our ascension to the good. If *diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*—a carriage accident, a bereavement—how much more the poetic Catharsis, with the effects which we have described above ? But none of all that suffices to supernaturalise poetic experience. Apart from this fundamental difference, theologians are not yet agreed on the "really distinctive characteristics of Christian mysticism." For Père Maréchal, whose authority is so great, higher contemplation implies "a new element qualitatively distinct from normal psychological activities and ordinary grace"—that is, "the active non-symbolic presentation of God to the soul, with its psychological correlative, the immediate intuition of God by the soul"; but "it is not forbidden even to Catholics to refer the higher mystical states to a simple quantitative increase of normal psychological power and of ordinary supernatural grace, or, if you will, in theological language, to a pure intensification of the infused virtues communicated at baptism" (Maréchal, *op. cit.*, p. 200. Cf. the important work of Père Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation*, Saint-Maximin, 1924).

the last resort is but an evanescent mystic whose mysticism breaks down.

I beg the poets not to be angry. The splendid gift that they have received demands that they should be like this. The more they realise the idea of the poet as such, the further they are from the idea of the mystic as such. The infirmity which we are about to study does not originate in some definite poetic or artistic shortcoming, but exists in the very nature of things; it is, indeed, a sort of metaphysical perfection. The poet whose specifically poetical activity should be identified with mystical activity properly so called would violate the order of the world; it would be as impossible for a lame man to walk straight.

The more of a poet any particular poet is, the more he is tormented by the need of communicating his experience; the more of a poet he is, the easier and the more inevitable he finds that magic transmuting power of words by means of which something of his poetical experience passes from his deeper soul to ours. The more of a mystic any particular mystic is, the less he feels this need of self-communication, and the more such communication seems to him impossible, should he have the desire to make it, as, indeed, in point of fact it is, all mystical grace supposes, "an absolutely gratuitous and free intervention on the part of God."¹ Well, you will say, does not that alone prove the inferiority of the mystic and the superiority of the poet? Yes, without any doubt,

¹ Picard, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

if it is a question of the communication of ideas, images, sentiments; no, if it is a question of a piece of real unitive knowledge. What can be clearly conceived can be clearly expressed; what one possesses, that to which one is united by the apex of the soul, cannot be given out. In both cases there is a certain apprehension, a possession of the real, without which there can be neither poetry nor mysticism; but in the case of the poet the apprehension is more superficial than is that of the mystic, less solid, less unifying. But surely, you will say again, by what right do you forbid the poet to make his apprehension, his possession, as close and deep as he may choose? It is not I who forbid him; it is poetic inspiration itself in its hurry to find words in which to communicate its message to the world. The poet *qua* poet can do nothing but speak. That is at once his glory and his irremediable weakness. He receives and appropriates a treasure which becomes partly ours through the effect of his magic of words; there is his glory. But the poet, in his haste to exploit and transmit this treasure, handles it badly, and only gets hold of it superficially; that is his weakness. As this point may seem a little subtle, may I be allowed to explain it in dry technical terms, which will give us an opportunity to analyse more profoundly than we have been able to do up to the present, the fundamental parable of *Animus* and *Anima*, the distinction between the *I* and the *Me*?

We define both the activities, with the comparison

of which this whole work is concerned, as real and unitive knowledge. There is apprehension, possession of the real in both cases, that of the poet and that of the mystic. Now, we must remember that, although this experience requires first of all the awakening and *entrée en scène* of *Anima* set free by the Catharsis, it cannot be carried out without the collaboration of *Animus*. That the union thus commenced should grow complete and produce all its fruit, it is necessary that at least two of our faculties, the reason and the will, at first more or less suspended and reduced to a repose which is never total; that these two faculties, I say, refreshed by that very repose and stimulated by the intense activity of the apex of the soul, should take a hand in the game. That presence which *Anima* alone can touch, and which she has just touched in the first phase of the experience, but only obscurely and indistinctly, must be "thought," interpreted, named, classed as well as he can, in his ordinary categories by *Animus*. He must freely accept and will this experience, which has imposed itself on the centre of the soul, and be ready to pay whatever price may be exacted in return for this gratuitous gift. The possession of the real, union with God, only becomes truly human and fully fertile at this double price: the active adhesion of the reason and the active adhesion of the will.

Which is the most necessary of the two to the perfection of the experience? Manifestly, the adhesion of the will. This becomes at once intelligible from a glance at the map of the soul. The will is nearer

the centre of the soul than the discursive reason—so near, indeed, that it can only be distinguished from it with difficulty—and numerous mystics identify the two,¹ in which, however, I think they are mistaken, since every act of the will in the proper sense of the word, every exercise of free choice, supposes a previous intervention of rational knowledge: *Nil volitum nisi cognitum*. However, without entering into these distinctions, we clearly perceive that the union which offers itself, which already begins to effect itself in real knowledge, the union of *Anima* with the real, the commencement of love not yet meriting the name of love, awaits, implores, and calls for the firm adhesion of *Animus*—that is, an integral act of free-will. The soul should open itself entirely to the gift which is made to it, drawing it in, breathing it in, permitting it to reach, to penetrate, to electrify, so to say, all the fibres of the will. And it is just here that the infirmity of the poet is displayed; the love which is asked of him, and easy for him to give, *qua* poet, he cannot give, although in the course of normal mystical experience *Animus* unites himself with all his voluntary energy to the presence felt in the depths of *Anima*. Whence comes this necessary difference? Once more, from the special character belonging to poetic activity, the sole object of the poet being, not like that of the mystic, to appropriate to himself the divine gift,

¹ Père Picard says admirably that the intelligence and the imagination are “more profane by nature” than the will (*op. cit.*, p. 36).

but to discover the suitable incantations by means of which the poetic current may pass to the *Anima* of the reader. Poetic experience does not permit the union of love which follows every normal mystic experience to take place. The poet *qua* poet only unites himself to the real in order to separate himself immediately from it. This is not, I beg of you to believe, a paradox; or, rather, it is a paradox, but not invented by me; it is the paradox of the poet. For the poet is, as we said, a broken-down mystic, the same as ourselves in the moral order (by which I mean mediocre), while the gift that he has received ought to enrich him, lift him above average humanity, make him equal to the saints. His paradox is that of a force which urges to the sublime life the subject on which it seizes, and which yet, at the same time, distracts him, in spite of himself, from these magnificent ambitions, and concentrates him, exhausting itself by doing so, on such trifling matters as "a happy choice of harmonious words." *It is the paradox of the spring dispersed at its source.* "One would say," writes Vinet, "that poets have been sent to *speak*, and not to *be*. When they have done their poem, there remains nothing in them of that great thought [rather of that force], as if they had lost it by giving it expression." And he adds with his marvellous insight: "Too strong a moral life is often an obstacle to poetic creation."¹ From which comes our attitude towards the poet; we place nothing above

¹ *Esprit de Vinet* (Astier), ii, p. 400.

poetry but prayer, but as for the majority, at least, of poets, we have some difficulty in taking them tragically. A strange race, said Coventry Patmore, who knew them well. They are like half-saints; they have the most exquisite spiritual sense and the most cowardly conscience. Their genius seems to confer on them a sort of sanctity independent of all virtue. So they prophesy without incurring any responsibility. The saint does not dare say aloud what he has in his heart; he would be judged himself by his words. He would betray the personal sanctity which has made of him a seer. Contrariwise with the poet. He can say anything; he knows quite well that, however beautiful his visions may be, no one will take him for a saint. Hear Patmore, himself a poet:

The poet occupies a singular position in the hierarchy of beings: half-way between a saint and Balaam's ass.¹

These ideas, which are not new, but which philosophers, with the exception of Maurice Blondel, have not yet, perhaps, deliberately confronted, would demand an infinite development. I will content myself with summing them up in two lines: in every mystical experience worthy of the name, *Animus* and *Anima* collaborate in an act of love, of love in the perfect sense of the word; that is the end appointed by Providence, and also psychologically necessary to this experience. In the poetic experience this act of

¹ *Religio Poetae* p. 2.

love, of the complete union with the real, touched and confusedly possessed, miscarries fatally, the *Animus* or the will of the poet being absorbed by other activities which do not tend to realise, to draw closer, to perfect that union.

And note the consequence, equally inevitable, of the inhibition we have just observed: the almost complete paralysis of *Animus* (the will) involves a partial paralysis of *Anima* (the reason). In passionate pursuit of the conceptual symbols, ideas and images on which he has to graft, so to speak, his incantations, and without which he will have no means of making the magic current pass, the poet—that is, the *Animus* of the poet—at first summoned to the centre of the soul, flies from it almost immediately, brought back to the zone of notions and words by the need he has of self-communication. A lamentable breakdown, with which we do not reproach the poet, because it is the ransom of his genius. His reason turns away from the Real when he has but scarcely seized it, and cannot do otherwise. His reason has no means of appropriating that Real by interpretation; for that another gift would be required, that of mystical grace. And it is here, I think, that we find the essential difference between the poet and the mystic. God being the Reality of Realities, they are both united to God, but the God thus possessed is not named by the *Animus* of the poet, while the *Animus* of the mystic names him. It is very certain that we have to pass through God in order to reach effectively the smallest reality, but it is no less

certain that we can only pass through God by means of God. Now to pass through the living and hidden God is to enter the mystical order; it is to accept detachment, the night of the senses and of the understanding, the gratuitous initiative of the heavenly Father, the docile response to the grace of charity, the effective union of our will with the divine will. Without this initiative, without this superhuman and special infusion of light and love, and without the active response of *Animus* to this God whom he has recognised and named, there may no doubt sometimes occur simple mimetisms, and also preliminary sketches, preparations, and hypothetical anticipations of the soul, but there is no mysticism in the proper and sacred sense of the word.

There is, therefore, heterogeneity, without any possible confusion; an impassable barrier between the two experiences with which we are occupied. Mysticism is absolutely transcendent; poetic experience is, indeed, a preliminary sketch of mystical experience, but a sketch which, on the one hand, calls for the brush to complete it, and, on the other, rejects it. A curious fact, which has not perhaps been sufficiently noted, is that this is only strictly true of the higher poetic states—of those, I mean, which crystallise in true poems. In the case of ourselves, inferior poets, nothing prevents the experience provoked by the view of a landscape or the reading of the poets being enriching to us, insensibly transforming itself into a religious or even a specifically mystical experience;

not only does nothing prevent this, but, on the contrary, the order of nature and the order of Providence wish the sketch, in our case, to become a portrait. The reason is always the same: the poet *qua* poet cannot prevent himself speaking; the reader can, and ought to remain silent, because the shock communicated to our deeper soul by the magic of the verse is not intense enough to impose on us this effort of artistic creation which takes entire hold of the poet, and only lets him go with difficulty. We are free to let the current mount to our surface faculties, to apply our reason to the one task of the interpretation of the mystery which invades us, and our will to that of drawing closer the union begun. In order to give its real name to the reality which offers itself to our apprehension, and to possess it fully, we no doubt require a new and better grace, a free gift which the reading of the most sublime poet will not impart to us, but for which it invites us to ask. In the case of the perfect poet himself, the poetic experience tends to turn into prayer, but never actually does so; in our case, it does so without difficulty, and thanks to the poet. Strange and paradoxical nature of poetry: a prayer which does not itself pray, but which makes others pray.

There are, of course, metaphysical precisions to be made. Not very subtle ones for those, at least, who have not been at odds with the play of ideas from their birth. It is therefore useless to remind me that Racine used to go to Mass. The pure poet never existed; pure poetic

experience is a myth. A great poet may also be a pious man; indeed, an authentic contemplative like St Augustine or the author of the *Imitation*. But even in their case poetic activity disengaged by an effort of analysis and isolated from the thousand activities which accompany it, block it, and turn by turn help and obstruct it, is not a formal act either of love or of faith. It has nothing specifically religious or meritorious about it. I am, naturally, speaking only of those pages of the *Confessions*, equivalent in their verbal magic to the most beautiful lines of Virgil. The more poetically perfect these pages are, the further they are from prayer; and the further they are from prayer, the more they are productive of prayer. And that, too, directly: automatically, so to speak; not in the manner of sermons or of pious effusions in prose. For, once more, we are not here concerned with the ideas presented by the poet or with the sentiments which he awakes in our minds; we are concerned with the movement which he imprints on the centre of our souls, releasing by doing so a whole psychological mechanism, the springs of which require nothing but a supernatural impulse to be adapted to the specific activities, and serve the special ends of true prayer. From which the reader may see that it would be equally unintelligent to remind me that Lucretius was a blasphemer. The man, the philosopher who expresses such and such ideas and sentiments, certainly. The poet *qua* poet, no. Poetic experience knows not blasphemy any more than prayer, but while it is

absolutely impossible for it to provoke to blasphemy, it cannot help starting the psychological mechanism of prayer. The chapter on Lucretius in Keble's *Praelectiones Academicæ* is nothing but a long hymn. And now, whether we have been too subtle or not, we come back to something more commonplace.

It is at once by poetry and by penetrating beyond it, writes Baudelaire, by music and by penetrating beyond it, that the soul catches a glimpse of the splendour on the other side of the grave; and when an exquisite poem brings tears to the eyes, these tears are no proof of excessive pleasure.

Poetry, as such, is never the pleasure of the senses.

They are, rather, the witness of an irritated sensibility, a demand of the nerves [no ! of *Anima*], of a nature exiled in the imperfect which longs to *seize immediately* on this very earth the paradise revealed to it.

This is true of all poetic experience, whatever may be the "subject" treated by the poet. Beauty, says Maritain, all beauty, tends of itself to unite us to God. The reason and the manner of this tendency is what I have been trying to show in these pages, and which I repeat in a few words: *primo*, there is another thought besides abstract and discursive thought, another knowledge as well as conceptual and rational knowledge; *secundo*, neither real knowledge nor rational knowledge, each of which, moreover, requires the other for its development, can reach completion without implying the exercise of faculties divinely set in motion

by the mystical life. Whence come both the excellence and the essential imperfection of poetical experience, the stepping-stone to a higher experience, which in some way it calls out for, but to which, of itself, it would never lead; rather would it block approach.

A fine passage of M. Hamon sums up admirably what I have tried to say in this last chapter: "It is incomparably easier to love *if one remains silent than if one talks*. The care of searching for words greatly obstructs the movement of the heart, which always loses something by doing so, unless it is recompensed for its loss by the gain that others may make. If the result is a little less love and a little more distraction and danger, the soul suffers a great loss if she knows the price of love and of prayer."¹

¹ *Traité de Piété*, 1689, ii, p. 467



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